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### No Lockdown On Caste Atrocities

STORIES OF CASTE CRIMES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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This book is dedic	cated to all those who lost	their lives, and to the
	of caste atrocities comm	

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In Solidarity. Jai Bhim! Manjula Pradeep Director of Campaigns, Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet)

### Introduction

As India went into a nationwide lockdown to fight the coronavirus pandemic, Caste animosity continued its rampage and destroyed the lives of hundreds of Dalit persons across the country. This book narrates horrific stories of innocent Dalits who bore the brunt of, "No lockdown on Caste Atrocities" in seven states of the country. The Dalit Human Rights Defenders (DHRDNet) Network is sharing these stories of caste crimes to enable the victims to get legal and social justice.

Each story (detailed and short reads) presents the role of caste dynamics in the crime. When you read these stories of pain, the network urges you to experience it and hold it. Just that! Do not pity the victims, they are mighty strong persons... Respond with rage instead. We urge you to commit to enquiring into the psycho-social and legal dynamics that perpetuate such heinous crimes in our society. These stories of pain should help each one of us to reflect on what we can do as an individual or as a community to ensure the root causes for these crimes are addressed and the legal system is empowered to rectify the injustice.

To take assenting action, the network invites all readers to go beyond the extra-ordinary violence that has occurred in these cases, to investigate the 'caste-patriarchy' structures that enable this violence and invest in it. So, for example when you read the story titled, "She May Never Walk Again," that describes

the rape of a 16-year-old girl by a powerful 'Darbar' community man whose ruthless violence also broke her spine, it's important to stop and go beyond the cruelty and heinousness of the incident; in order to struggle to understand what these caste perpetrators achieve by committing this crime and how it, in fact, benefits them.

These acts of violence are often dismissed as crimes of insanity but the fact is these are well thought out crimes committed to brutally assert the deep-rooted caste hierarchy in our society. Caste discrimination is legitimized as 'divinely ordained.'

DHRDNet appeals to the reader to not look at these crimes as just aberrations or the perpetrators as individuals who are 'bad people and not like us.' It is important to understand that they are all products of a self-perpetuating, unequal, society that is structured to benefit those from the dominant castes.

The nature of domination manifests in almost all aspects of daily living. As you read stories like, "Beaten for Being Thirsty" it is evident how untouchability results in a Dalit graduate and his mother being brutally assaulted for demanding water from a public tap in their village. Stories like "Death Penalty for Midday Leave," show how just taking half a day's leave for a headache can result in unbelievable humiliation and even murder for a farm labourer.

The violence is not limited to the impoverished only. In fact, stories like, "Education is
No Protection from Violence" or "Hacked to
Death Over Land Dispute" show how, as Dalits
struggle to improve their situation with
education and better livelihood, things are
getting unbelievably vicious. This book's 60
stories even during a complete lockdown
highlight the rapidly increasing frequency
of violence as the dominant caste feels
threatened by the rise of the Dalit
community. These dreadful and ghastly
stories also highlight the legal gaps,
negligence of the Police and the failure of
the Administration in controlling suchcrimes.

There is an urgent need to take the following immediate actions to give justice to all the victims in these stories:

- Ensure FIRs are filed under correct sections of PoA
- 2. Ensure immediate arrest of accused and protection for victims from harassment
- Ensure there is no delay in filing of a charge sheet
- Make sure the victims do not face intimidation
- Ensure strict monitoring of the trial process and opposing bail plea of the accused
- 6. Sustained legal and financial support and rehabilitation of the victim and ensuring they receive compensation as per law

All this needs deeply committed multidisciplinary teams including lawyers, activists, counsellors across the country. There is also a need to have more centres.
Grassroots

activists monitoring remote areas providing such comprehensive support need financial and legal resources. A detailed demand for support with recommendations has been submitted by DHRDNet to the Members of Parliament. The petition is available in the annexure of this book.

Along with these legal actions, there is an even more urgent need to strengthen the social re-engineering process that is an essential way to counter the roots of this inhuman division. It's important to realise that when we question the dominant caste perpetrators, we do not want anyone to define any community by these violent acts against the Dalit community. Having said that it is equally imperative for the dominant community to keep in mind that these heinous acts are not just an act of insanity.

The perpetrator is a product of the caste system<sup>1</sup> that is characterised by six important features:

- 1. Segmented division of society
- 2. Hierarchy
- Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse
- 4. Lack of unrestricted choice of occupations
- Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections
- 6. Restrictions on marriage

<sup>1</sup> NHRC Atrocities Report 2004

These are age old power control mechanisms that need to be urgently abolished.

We hope the stories in this book will touch, move and inspire each one of you to raise your voice democratically to annihilate the caste system for liberating the 200 million Dalit persons living across the world.

In Solidarity,

Jai Bhim,

Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet)



# Young Dalit Voice Silenced for Water

All he demanded was that Dalits get drinking water and protection from floods, but the village Brahmins tortured him all night and dumped his naked body in the village bus stand

n the night of 16th July 2020, 27
year-old Pintu Galchar was dragged
from his house by a group of six
Brahmin men. His defenceless family
watched as he shouted and screamed for
help. The men accused him of a local theft
and abused him.

Pintu desperately denied the allegations and even begged the mob to check the village CCTV footage to find the real criminal and prove his innocence. He was strong but was overpowered by the men who tied him to a Mahindra Bolero SUV and sped away. Through the night, people living in the vicinity could hear Pintu's screams, but no one came to his rescue. Fear kept everyone away. Pintu's old widower father and family silently prayed through the horrific night, hoping their son would be back home bruised, but alive after the Brahmins extracted their vengeance.

On the morning of the 17th July, as Pintu's sister Seema stepped out to get water, she noticed a huge crowd gathered near the local bus stop. Her heart sank as she waded through the crowd to see her brother's body, stripped naked with gruesome wounds.

She came running back home to inform her family. The father was devastated. He had not just lost a brave son but also the only breadwinner. Pintu had been the sole earner after his brothers were forced to come back from various cities as factories were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He was a young, strong, and proud Dalit man who regularly raised his voice for human rights in his village, 'Ravi.' It is located in Dhanera Taluka of Gujarat's arid border district of Banaskantha. It is in the periphery of Gujarat, 10 kilometres from the border with the State of Rajasthan. The area, like many other remote rural parts of the country, is notorious for horrific cases of violence against Dalits.

At Ravi village, there are around four hundred and fifty-three families and the Brahmin caste dominates the social hierarchy. They are both the most populous and powerful amongst the four castes – Brahmins, Dalits, Rabari (shepherd) and Koli (OBC).

They own most of the agricultural land and most Dalit families depend on them for agricultural and casual labour work. In the last four decades, the village has only had a Brahmin Sarpanch and the present Sarpanch, Mayaben, is considered a proxy for her husband Hansraj Purohit who is the main accused in the Pintu murder case.

Literacy rates are low in this border village compared to the rest of Gujarat; it is only around 57 percent compared to Gujarat's 78 percent. Despite this low literacy some Dalit families have walked into school. Sanjay Kevabhai Galchar, Pintu's brother and the complainant in the case, studied till 7th Standard.



The Dalits in the village are subdivided into about 70 families of Chamars, ten families each of Turi Barots and Garodas. The Chamar community, to which Pintu's family belongs, are the most vulnerable amongst even Dalits here and often must endure enormous abuse.

Pintu questioned this Brahmin caste dominated village administration on several issues. For years, he raised his voice against the building of an embankment around one side of the village lake, which could lead to flooding in the houses of the Dalit families who lived on the other side.

Each year, during monsoons, Dalits live in the fear of floods and despite repeated appeals to the administration the embankment remained untouched. Pintu had continued to challenge the Brahmins on this issue and refused to surrender to their threats.

This was not the only issue he had taken up. Dalits suffer even to get basic drinking water and the problem has persisted for years. A separate water tank was constructed for the Dalits in the village but the operator of the borewell, a Brahmin, would not fill the tank completely. Pinturaised this issue and went to the Gram Panchayat to seek justice.

Unable to silence Pintu's protests, the Brahmins, led by Hansraj Purohit, conspired to accuse him in a false case. On the night of the 16th, they accused him of stealing from a village shop 15 days ago and dragged him out of his house claiming to investigate the theft.

They tortured him all night, killed him and dumped his stripped body at the local bus stand the next morning.

As soon as news of the murder came into public domain, a network of activists were alerted and a team of the HDRC and Dalit Sangathan went to visit Pintu's family. Community leaders Vasudev Charupa, Hitendra Rathore, Ajaybhai Solanki and Ishwarbhai Parmar along with Kantibhai Solanki and Jayeshbhai of the Dhanera Nagarpalika were part of the team that visited the village.

This visit bolstered the family's confidence and led them to file a police complaint and subsequent registration of a FIR (FIR No. 1119018200669) at the Dhanera Police Station.

After the filing of an FIR, the six accused, including Hansraj Purohit, were arrested. However, the battle for justice and eventual conviction of the accused will be a long-drawn process that requires sustained effort and constant monitoring of the case.

On the one hand, there is a battle to get justice for Pintu. On the other, there is a need to raise the issues facing the Dalit community in the village that Pintu had fought for and ensure that the upper castes cannot brazenly get away with murder.

Image Credit: Jyoti Singh

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.

Concept Note: The image depicted here was carved with soy and paraffin wax. It is a 3D illustration of a murder scene, surrounded by different carved emotions of people's face which follows a big carved mouthcomplimenting the big dead eyes dripping down blood burdened by the weight of blood-soaked dead legs indicating the inflicted pain on the body of the victim.

## A Deepavali of Darkness

Ramaswamy and Arrukani paid with their lives for reprimanding drunken, caste Hindu youth who harassed their daughter and assaulted their son-in-law



s India celebrated Diwali 2020 on the 14th of November, Dalits at the district of Tamil Nadu were reminded of the brutality of caste with a horrific twin murder. 58-year-old Ramaswamy and his 54-year-old wife Arrukani were hacked to death in their home, in front of their 12-year-old grandson by a caste Hindu group.

Having worked hard as a watchman all his life, Ramaswamy was known to be strong, humorous and a compassionate person in his village. People enjoyed his company and trusted him. He had suffered a stroke a few years ago, but he recovered from the setback.

His wife Arrukani was a pillar of strength and together the couple lived a life of impoverishment, but never let go of their dignity. They hailed from the Scheduled Caste Arunthathiyar community and had taught their sons 35-year-old Yuvaraj and 28-year-old Bhoopathi and daughter 31 year-old Menaka never to bow to caste compulsions.

Though the Scheduled Castes are a majority in the village with around 120 families, the OBC Gounder caste is the dominant one in this region and caste Hindus hold the gates to political and social power. A couple of other caste Hindu families like the Nadars also live in the village and dalits like Ramaswamy continue to fight for an elusive equality.

For instance, Dalit families live in small huts, like the one Ramaswamy has, in a

secluded corner of the village without even basic sanitation facilities whereas caste Hindu families own large acreage of land and houses.

Ramaswamy's daughter Menaka married a caste Hindu boy Perumal from another village and the marriage had ignited caste tensions in the area. However, Ramaswamy and his family were strong and brave. They stood behind Menaka and Perumal and shielded the couple.

Menaka and Perumal moved to another village after their marriage and lived a peaceful life with their 12-year-old son Bairavamoorthy. The sparks of caste tensions had subsided in their marriage and Menaka would often visit her family at Chittappullapalaya.

A year ago, another inter-caste marriage had reignited tensions. A girl from the Nadar caste had married a Dalit boy. The girl's father Swaminathan had a strong hold in the village and caste Hindu groups had threatened and insulted Dalit families.

Even as these tensions were simmering, on the 13th of November, Menaka had come with Perumal and her son to spend Deepavali with her parents and siblings. It was a happy reunion for the family which could not meet during the lockdown.

Menaka and Perumal had stepped out to enjoy the festive mood when they crossed a bunch of inebriated caste Hindu groups lead by Suriya, who belongs to the Nadar caste, and his six friends bursting crackers outside the primary school.

The inebriated youth began passing lewd and sexually offensive comments at Menaka and started harassing her.
One of them even yelled, "load the crackers into Perumal's mouth," and continued harassing the couple. Menaka reprimanded them, but a Dalit girl speaking back to them only infuriated the caste Hindu group.

Suriya and his friends started targeting Perumal and passing lewd and casteist comments. They shouted at Menaka, "You are living with our caste man and you are expecting respect and you brought dishonour to our community".

The couple was seething with anger and when Perumal tried to defend his wife's honour and scolded them, Suriya and his friends began a physical assault.

They pushed Perumal to the ground and smashed his head on a rock. A happy Deepavali outing had turned into a nightmare for the couple. A desperate Menaka called her parents and brother Yuvraj for help and the family rushed to the spot.

Ramaswamy and Yuvraj reprimanded Suriya and his friends and threatened to file a police complaint. But the drunken caste Hindu group physically assaulted Ramaswamy before leaving the place.
The family decided to rush a profusely bleeding Perumal to the nearby Kodumudi government hospital for treatment. After initial treatment and bit of rest, the doctors asked Menaka to take Perumal to a bigger hospital for a CT scan to detect internal injuries. More than 24 hours had passed since the attack and around 12 AM on the 14th of November, Menaka called her father to inform him of the developments.

A nervous Ramaswamy told Menaka that caste tensions were peaking in the village and that a mob of 20 upper caste men, led by Suriya and his friends, are running around in the Dalit area. Ramaswamy told his daughter not to come back to the village as the couple could be targeted.

This despite the fact that Menaka's son Bairavamoorthy was still with Ramaswamy and Arrukani. The old couple had to protect their grandchild, but also knew that their daughter and son in law would be attacked the moment they returned.

At around 1.30 AM, soon after Ramaswamy spoke with Menaka, the mob, armed with sickles and knives, broke into the house and hacked Ramaswamy and his wife to death.

A shivering Bairavamoorthy witnessed the murder in silence and was in a state of shock. His beloved grandparents who had showered love and hugs on him since his birth were hacked into pieces and their bodies were lifeless on the ground.

The shocked and wailing child managed to call Menaka, Yuvraj and Bhoopathi and informed them of the tragedy. The three rushed to the spot. The joy in their lives and the shelter of parental love had been permanently lost to caste animosity.

Broken and beaten, Menaka, Yuvraj and Bhoopati finished the last rites for their parents and embarked on a desperate quest for justice. They contacted local Human Rights Defenders Muthu, Dharmadurai and Palanisamy trained by Evidence and the three helped the family file a case.

Two separate cases were filed, one in the case of harassment, FIR No. 459/2020, where Menaka and Perumal were witnesses and the other is the case of double murder, FIR No 460/2020, of Ramaswamy and Arrukani in which their grandson Bairavamoorthy and a neighbour, Lakshmi, are key witnesses.

The 12-year-old remains in a state of shock and still breaks into cold sweats with nightmares. It is a loss and wound that the young boy may never recover from.

The police arrested Suriya and six of his friends for the attack. But there needs to be detailed probe into the role of other caste leaders in the area.

Key action taken by DHRD includes a fact-finding mission to collect facts and filing a formal complaint, assisting the family to collect documents, interactions and reassurances to them along with counselling support and constant follow ups with local officials.

It is imperative to protect the witnesses and ensure suitable compensation and a speedy trial. State government should ensure that action is taken and bail should be denied to the accused.

There is also a great need to protect inter-caste couples and monitor caste tensions after such marriages to ensure that Dalits are protected from the wrath of caste Hindus.

Image Credit:

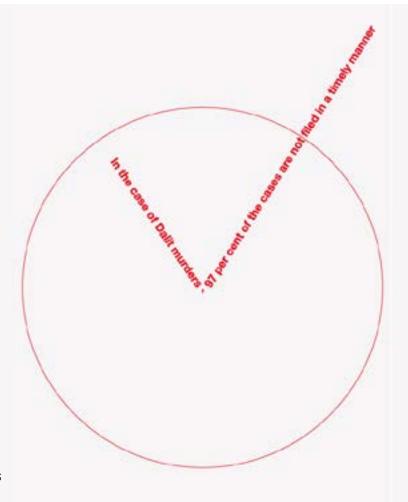
Previous Spread: Sunil Abhiman Awchar

Below: Yogesh Barve

These artworks were created for the DHRDNet and

Public Bolti social media campaign called

#LockDownCasteAtrocities.



# She May Never Walk Again

A Dalit girl was raped and thrown near a water tank by a notorious 'upper' caste offender and may now be paralyzed waist down for life



pooja (name changed) was not even a teenager when her father, Dineshbhai Chaudasma, died. Her brother Sunnybhai had barely reached his teens and was in his 8th standard, but the loss of their father meant he would have to drop out of school and earn daily bread for his little younger sister, an older sister and their mother Rekhaben.

Rekhaben and Sunnybhai's older sister, Daxaben, took up whatever work they could to augment the boy's income, but the responsibility of keeping the family from starving was on Sunnybhai Chaudasma's young shoulders.

He would do all kinds of odd jobs and work long hours to bring in some money. The family endured abject poverty and lived together in a small 8 feet by 8 feet semi constructed shelter they called home.

There was no tapped water or sanitation. They had electricity but nothing else. Despite these hardships the four of them had enormous love and commitment for each other. This was all that held them together.

Palitana, the temple town in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district is where the family lived, and the mainstay for poor Vankar Dalit families like the Chaudasmas. Their work is related to attending to pilgrims at local hotels or shops or as labourers at factories in the nearby Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation complex.

There are about 70 to 80 Dalit families in Palitana and the dominant castes in the area include the Kadva Patels, Darbars and Kolis in sizeable numbers. While the Kadva Patels are financially the most powerful, Darbars, like the 26-year-old Jayrajsinh Gambhirsinh Kotila, are notorious for links with politics and illegal businesses.

Jayrajsinh himself is notorious for harassing women in the area and while the other dominant castes retaliate against harassment of their women, poor Dalit families often suffer in silence. Sunnybhai's sisters had also faced harassment but the family had no resources to fight back.

Over the past few years, they had adjusted to life without a father and at ninteen Sunnybhai had become stronger.
Young Pooja had also turned 16 and had finished her 8th standard. The family was waiting for her to turn 18 before they could start looking for a groom.

In India, the responsibility of getting women married falls on the brother in the absence of a father, and Sunnybhai wanted to fulfil the task. But a horrific turn of events on the 7th of April 2020, amidst a nationwide lockdown and deserted streets, left his family and little younger sister devastated and, perhaps, crippled for life.

Early in the morning, Rekhaben realized that Pooja was missing. She had gone outside the house in the morning to fetch water but did not come back.

Sunnybhai was just getting ready for another day of hard labour when Rekhaben asked him to look for Pooja.

The mother and son walked around the area looking for the young girl. Suddenly, to Sunnybhai's horror, he saw his sister lying near the water tank a few hundred meters from their house. He rushed to her and realized she was bleeding and could not move.

Initially, Sunnybhai did not understand what had happened and screamed for help. A few people gathered and they realized that the girl had suffered severe fractures of the spine and hip and was bleeding from her genitals.

The semi-conscious girl, suffering in excruciating pain, told her brother she had been raped by Jayrajsinh and was inconsolable. Sunnybhai did not understand what to do and all he knew was that he first had to get his little sister to a hospital.

He gathered whatever help he could and rushed her to the government hospital nearby. The doctors confirmed that she had been raped and that her lumbar vertebrae had been fractured. Pooja may never be able to walk again.

She has undergone several surgeries since the incident and is still almost paralyzed waist down. The accused had often harassed Pooja and would tease her on her way to school. He had demanded that she speak to him and knew that the poor Dalit family would not dare to challenge the 'upper' castes' harassment.

His family had both political and police connections and Jayrajsinh would carry on his brazen harassment knowing that the authorities would not touch him even if the victim complained. Despite elected Dalit representatives in the area, none dare to stand up to the clout of the castes like the Darbars, which only bolsters their ruthlessness.

While Sunnybhai and Rekhaben were worried about this, they never thought that it would one day completely destroy Pooja's life. They were hoping the harassment would come to an end as the days passed, but that was not to be.

As Pooja struggled in hospital, the family struggled for resources and reached out to the people of the area. The horrific nature of the crime and the plight of the girl shocked even the upper castes in the



area and some, like the Kadva Patel associations, donated money for the girl's surgery.

Sunnybhai's family filed a police complaint and given the strength of a rape survivor's statement under law, the police had no choice but to arrest the accused. In fact, even some local authorities were moved by the plight of the family and helped them.

Since there is no NGO working on Dalit rights in Palitana, the family had no idea who it could reach out to. Once the matter came to the attention of the DHRD network, activists reached out to Sunnybhai and offered him advice and all other assistance.

It was ensured that the police included stringent sections of the SC/ST Prevention of atrocities Act and arrested the accused and the matter was taken to trial on a priority basis.

However, the accused have the financial resources to hire legal assistance and have taken an application for bail to the High Court after it was denied by the trial court. At the moment DHRD network lawyers are working with the family of the rape survivor to oppose any such bail application at the Gujarat High Court.

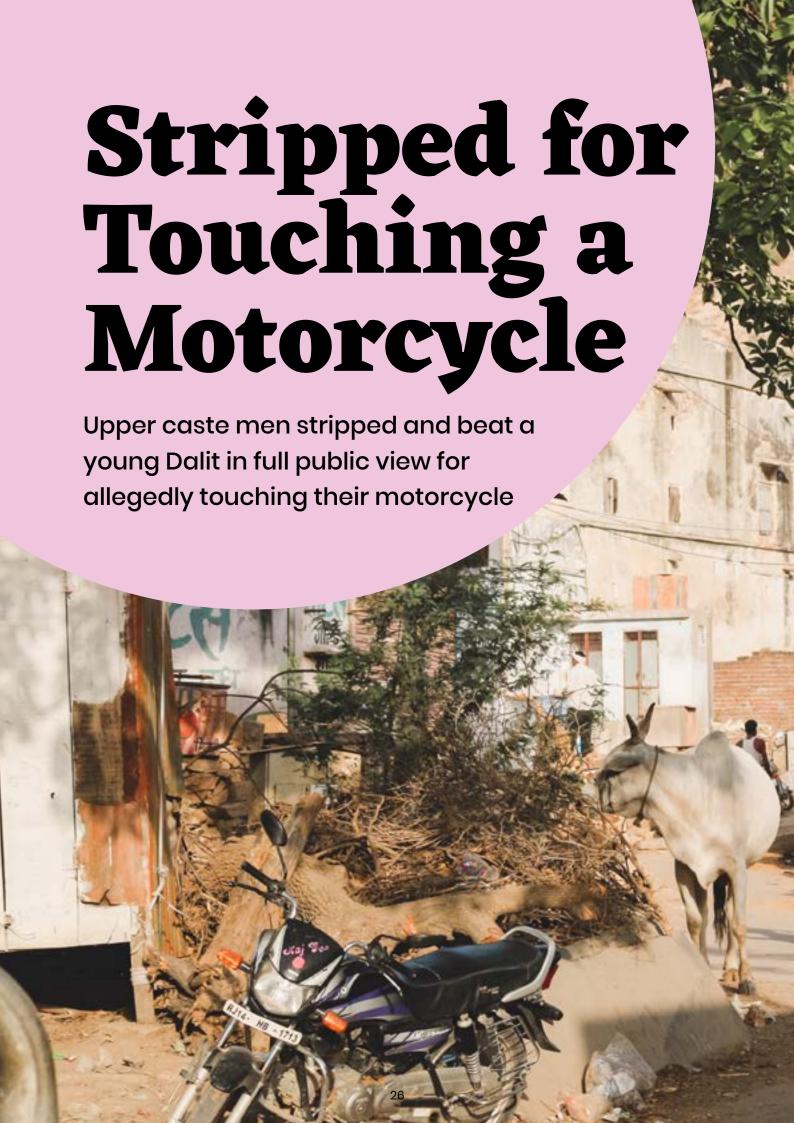
There is a desperate need for financial assistance for Pooja and though some donations have been made, she may need support for life and not just for medical treatment. The case also requires

enormous financial and legal resources as the accused will challenge the verdict of the trial court in higher judiciary.

The emotionally close-knit Chaudasma family may never recover from the horror of the 7th of April, but they have enclosed their brutalised sister with a blanket of love. The least that can be done for them is provide them with basic health and sanitation facilities, financial support and ensure that accused is punished as per law.

Image Credit: Malvika Raj

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.



n the 18th of July 2020, like any other day, 28-year-old Kashinath Talawar and his father, Fifty-eight year-old Yankappa Husanappa Talawar, were on their way to the agricultural fields in their village.

They work as daily wagers in the fields of the area, and it takes a full day's hard labour in the sweltering summer of North Karnataka's Vijayapura district to earn the most basic of a livelihood.

Several Dalit families at the Minajagi village of Talikoti Taluk struggle like the Talawars with hard work and their only dream is two meals and a life of dignity.

However, that fateful day will go down in Kashinath's life as the most painful and humiliating. Kashinath and Yankappa were walking towards the field when they were suddenly stopped by a group of 'upper" caste men. There were thirteen of them – all from different castes - and the one leading the group was Mahantesh.

With no warning Mahantesh started abusing Kashinath and accused the young Dalit man of having touched his motorcycle. Kashinath and Yankappa were taken aback and had no idea why they were being targeted.

Soon, the verbal abuse turned into a physical assault and four of them from the mob, along with Mahantesh, pounced on Kashinath and started hitting him.
When the helpless father tried to save his son, the mob started beating him too.
Kashinath's mother and sister were on

their way to the field and seeing the commotion they ran to help. But they too were beaten by the mob and pushed away. Soon, the physical assault turned into something more sinister.

A simple thrashing did not quench the caste animosity of the upper caste mob. They wanted to humiliate the hard-working Dalit boy and his family. They began stripping him and beat his father up repeatedly. When his mother and sister tried to protect him, they threatened, molested, and attempted stripping even the women.

Young Kashinath was burning in helplessness as he could not defend his mother, father, and sister's honour. But the upper caste mob kept at it.

They caned, kicked, and beat him up repeatedly as they stripped him off his clothes one by one. The pain of a brutal physical assault accompanied by the humiliation of being stripped in public was what Kashinath had to endure allegedly for touching a motorcycle.

It is evidence that in these parts of Karnataka, Vijaypura is notorious for crimes against Dalits, that even a motorcycle has caste written on it and the writ of the powerful is enforced with animosity.

The entire incident was videographed, and it shows a stripped and beaten Kashinath and his family wailing for help. The mob stood by and watched. It was entertainment for the onlookers.

Once they were done with the physical assault, the mob threatened to burn the entire Dalit village down if anyone dared to stand up to them.

The video clip of the incident went viral on the internet and caught the attention of activists and news networks sparking off a campaign for justice. It was shocking to those who were not familiar with caste atrocities of rural India. Their vocal protests forced the police into action. An inquiry was ordered, and police teams began investigating the incident.

In fact, the 'upper' caste villagers made false claims that Kashinath had molested women in the village.

However, given the fact that irrefutable evidence of the atrocity was there on tape, the police was compelled to act against the accused. Yankappa, a victim himself and an eyewitness to the assault on his son, had the help of Dalit rights defenders to file a case at the local police station.

Following this, all thirteen of the accused - Mahanthesh, Muthanna, Sharana Gowda, Sanganna Gowda, Guruappa, Nagesh, Mahanthesh.P, Raya, Manjunath, Manjunath.S, Ramesh, Eranna and Umesh - were arrested and sent to judicial custody.

It is important to note that the accused did not all belong to the same caste, but from a variety of 'upper' castes and is testimony to the fact that when it comes to an atrocity on a Dalit person, the castes often unite and promulgate the violence.

A case was filed on the same day of the incident under several sections of the IPC, including attempt to murder, and the SC/ST PoA 2015, but the family will have a long haul for justice. The caste groups continue to threaten them, and they live in a shadow of fear.

There is also the fear of false cases being foisted against Kashinath. It is a common practice in rural India that once a Dalit



files a case, the 'upper' castes come together and file a counter case and fearing harassment of the police the poorer and socially weaker Dalits often withdraw their complaint.

While the process of justice and law meanders through the convolutions of caste, Kashinath and his family may never recover from the psychological trauma of the incident. The video of the incident on the internet may have taken them a step towards justice but is also a painful reminder in the path to mental recovery.

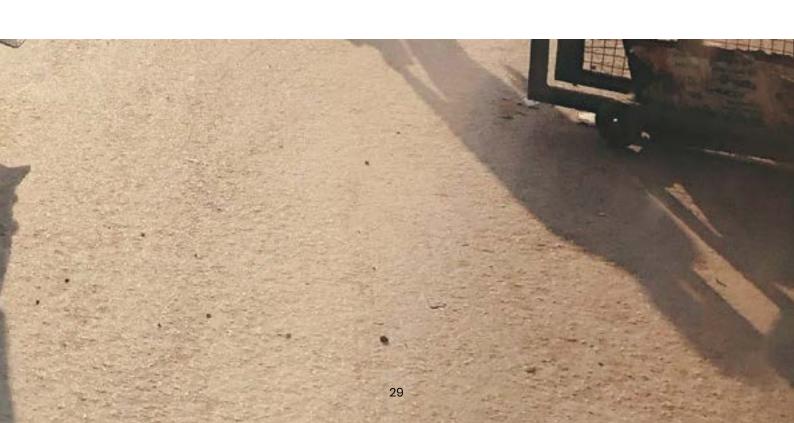
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Previous Spread: Ibrahim Rifath on Unsplash Below: Cassie Matias on Unsplash





# Beaten for Being Thirsty

A young Dalit graduate and his mother are brutally assaulted for demanding water from a public tap in their village oes water know caste? It does not, but those who control its supply in pipes and taps know caste and enforce it. It does not matter that an Indian summer in the largely arid state of Rajasthan is deadly.

The heat is unbearable. The human body is the same irrespective of caste and demands water to quench its thirst. Unfortunately, a Dalit, no matter how desperate, dying and educated, cannot quench that thirst from a tap reserved for the castes.

At Pachar village in Dataramgadh area of Rajasthan's Sikar district, near the capital Jaipur, caste rules are enforced with ferocity.

27-year-old Mukesh Varma grew up in Pachar and has a graduate degree in education but could not find a job. His brother is mentally challenged, and his father suffered a kidney ailment and Mukesh was desperate for income.

Therefore, despite his education, the boy from the Scheduled Caste Meghval community which is known for pottery, decided to take up work as a carpenter with a local contractor to earn some money.

On a particularly hot 7th of July 2020, he had stayed at home for some studies and his cousin Rekha had come visiting. The family ran out of water and Rekha took a big bottle to fill water from the village tap. Rekha and Mukesh had no idea that this would lead a violent caste backlash.

Some 'upper' caste members told Rekha not to fill water and the girl ran to her cousin for help. Mukesh went outside and saw an aggressive Ashok, Jhabar and Madan Kumavat standing next to the tap.

The Kumavats are a powerful caste in Rajasthan and occupy several key government and bureaucratic positions. And, at Pachar the three Kumavats next to the water tap wanted to ensure that the Dalit families live segregated and do not have access to the same water.

When Mukesh politely told them to please allow his family to fill water the Kumavats started hurling abuses at him. Suddenly, Madan, Ashok and Jabhar came rushing towards him. They had sticks in their hands and Mukesh pleaded with them that all he did was to drink water.

They would not listen and began beating him. Rekha went running for help to Mukesh's mother. Gehna Devi came rushing to save her boy, but the Kumavats pushed her to the ground and continued their assault.

Mukesh was left bleeding on the ground where the water flowed from his bottle to the drain. The three accused continued their physical and verbal abuse and threatened Mukesh that he would be killed if he ever drank water from the tap.

With no water to drink and helpless at not being able to defend himself and his mother, Mukesh somehow managed to find his way to a local dispensary and get some first aid.

This was a public tap, not owned by any individual. As per law any Indian citizen could access it. The very idea of such taps is to ensure that people, the poorest of the poor, have access to at least water and not die of dehydration.

However, in most parts of the country caste leaders take over public property as if it were their own and enforce caste rules in violation of the law. The tap at Pachar is just another example.

Finally, it was the support of a few Dalit rights defenders and some of the family's friends that helped Gehna Devi bolster the courage to file a complaint at the local police station on the atrocity committed against her and her son.

Initially, the police were callous to the victim's plight and did not register a complaint for the first five hours. But pressure from his fellow villagers and other Dalit rights defenders made sure that a case was filed. On the 8th of July 2020, a case under sections of the IPC and SC/ST atrocities prevention act was registered.

However, the accused were arrested only three days after the FIR was registered and the victim was taken to a local hospital to get a medical report on the injuries suffered.

Unfortunately, the police cited the lockdown as a reason for not producing the accused before the court and released them. In such cases, mere registration of FIRs and arrest of accused does not mean that these cases will eventually reach conviction.

Despite the brazen nature of these crimes, the accused often get away with a few days in custody and continue to enforce the same regressive caste behaviour as the judicial process plays out over years.

The DHRD network has been working with communities in this area for the last few years and has given them legal awareness to take up these issues. In this case the initial help was given by the Nyay foundation and DHRD network has later helped and provided support for pursuing the case.

As is often the case, the victims were threatened by the members from the 'upper' caste to drop the cases. It is the support of some neighbours and activists that has helped the victim stand firm on taking the matter to its logical conclusion.

There have been cases of Dalit men even being forced to drink urine as punishment for being with upper caste women and the brazenness of the acts are as disturbing as the fact that several cases go unpunished.

The National Crime Record Bureau's (NCRB) reports that in the last one-decade crimes against Dalits have risen by 37% while the conviction rate in such crimes increased by merely 2.5%.

The conviction rate in such crimes was 29.9% in 2009 and 32.1% in 2019. And what is worrying is that the NCRB data suggests that percentage of cases in which chargesheets are being filed is dropping. In 2009, 88.5 percent cases in which FIRs were filed turned into chargesheets, but in 2019 only 78.5 % of those cases ended up in a chargesheet. Rajasthan was one of the worst in terms of cases reaching the chargesheet stage at only 49% cases.

The highest number of cases of crimes against Dalits in the country in 2019 was registered in the State of Uttar Pradesh (11,829 cases) followed by Rajasthan (6,794 cases), and Bihar (6,544 cases).

Ultimately, the tap of caste continues to pour out injustice and leaves Dalits desperately thirsty for water and justice!

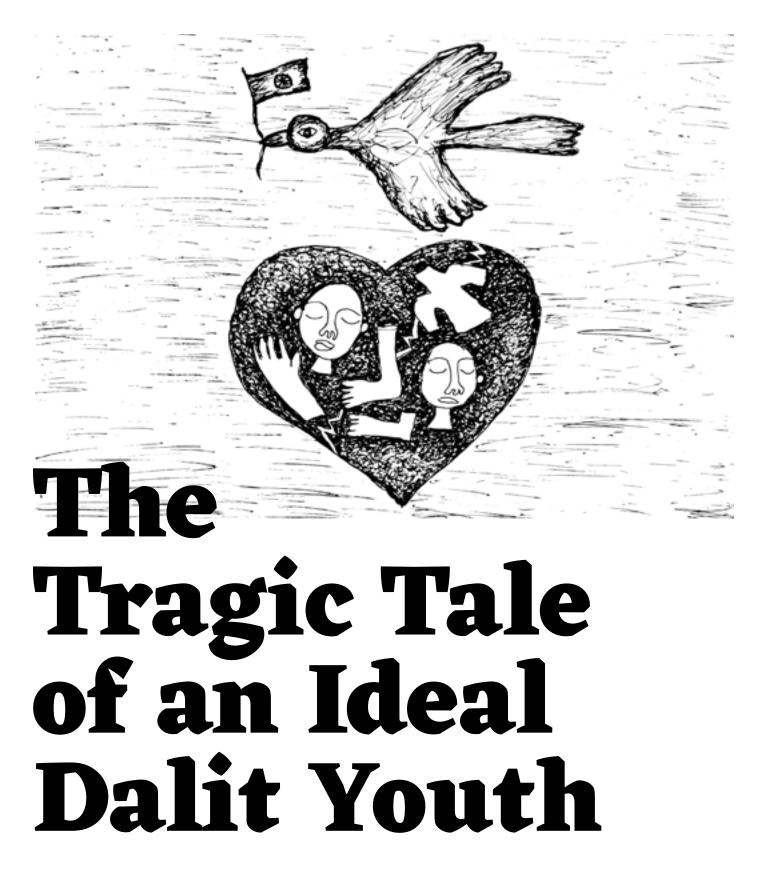
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Image Credits: Wikimedia





A student, entrepreneur, and activist Viraj is beaten to death by a Maratha caste group for being in love with a girl from their caste wenty-year-old Viraj Vilas Jagtap
lost his father when he was just
nine months old, but the close-knit
Jagtap family lived next to each other and
helped Vilas' mother Reshma rally through
the loss. They supported her financially
and emotionally to raise the child.

Viraj's father had worked with the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal corporation in the outskirts of the bustling Pune city of Maharashtra. Reshma, who had studied till class 10, was given the job of a health worker at the corporation on compassionate grounds. Viraj's uncle stayed next door and his grandmother was a pillar of support to the family.

The Jagtap family has a tradition of courage and have stood up for Dalit rights despite fierce caste domination by the Maratha caste in the area. Viraj's grandmother was elected as a Corporator in 2002 from a seat reserved for Dalits and had performed exemplary work to uplift the downtrodden.

Hundreds of Dalit families in the area, known as Jagtap Nagar, reaped the benefits of her work and Viraj's family enjoyed the respect of the people and economic security. The area had all basic amenities thanks to the work of elected representatives like Viraj's grandmother.

The young boy followed family tradition and was active in organising community programmes and rallies, like the ones held to celebrate birth anniversaries of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He was pursuing

his graduation, running his own tours and travels business to support his mother and yet he found time for community events.

In every way, Viraj was a role model for the young, irrespective of the caste they belonged to. He was focussed on the betterment of his family and society. Hard work was his path to equality with the dominant Maratha community, which owns most of the land in the area and controlled the politics of the region.

However, the claim to equality is not welcome in a dominant caste family.

Romance came without calling in young Viraj's life and like all love it knew no caste. Viraj fell in love with Manisha Kate (name changed). The girl belonged to the dominant Maratha caste but was totally in love with Viraj. Young Viraj had confided in his cousin sister and a few friends about the woman in his life.

The boy and girl kept their relationship a secret for nearly five years and would rendezvous frequently. They were waiting for the right time to decide on the way forward, but for the moment enjoyed the stolen moments of togetherness. However, the girl's family found out about the relationship. They threatened the couple and issued death threats to Viraj.

Late evening, on the 7th of June 2020, Viraj is suspected to have got a call from Manisha's family asking for him to come to a nearby area. It is not clear if the girl called him herself or if it was a family member. However, Viraj rushed from his house.

Manisha's brother, 24-year-old Hemant Kate, had prepared for a brutal assault on the Dalit boy and was waiting on the main road. Hemant confronted Viraj and began hurling casteist slurs and other abuses. Six young members of the Kate family were there with Hemant and the caste group began attacking Viraj. The young Dalit boy escaped from the Kates on his bike and rushed towards the safety of his house.

However, the Kates chased him in a tempo and crashed into the bike on the main road. Writhing with pain from the fall but having to run for his life Viraj kept moving. The intent of the caste group was to silence the Dalit boy.

The Kates, all six of them – Hemant Kailas Kate, Harshad Kailas Kate, Sagar Jagdish Kate, Rohit Jagdish Kate, Kailas Murlidhar Kate and Jagdish Murlidhar Kate – were armed with stones and iron rods. They chased down the injured Dalit boy and began a merciless assault. The rods and stones pounded on the boy's flesh and broke his skull.

A helpless Viraj was left bleeding on the main road. Jagdish Kate spat on Viraj and said, "You belong to the Mang and Mahar and how dare you loved my daughter".

The audacity of caste was so brazen that the group then called Viraj's uncle Jitesh Jagtap and told him, "You Dalits thinks you have become smart. We have beaten Viraj to pulp, come and carry him from near Shiv Bakery."

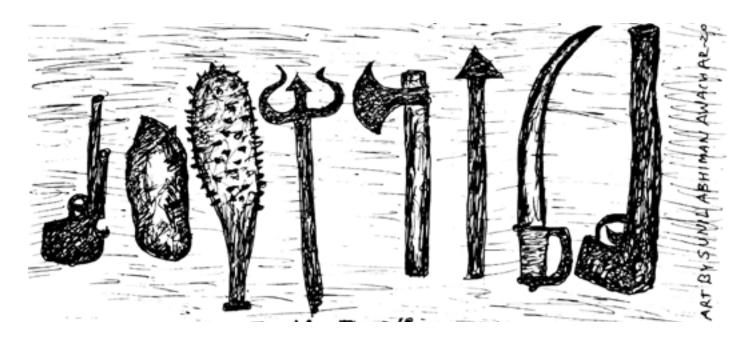
A shocked Jitesh rushed to the spot and found Viraj in desperate need of medical help. They rushed him to the nearest hospital but were refused admission. The Covid-19 lockdown made matters worse and it was difficult to find medical help. By the time Jitesh found a hospital for his nephew the boy's condition had deteriorated severely.

The boy struggled for his life for a few hours and eventually succumbed to the injuries on the 8th of June.

The loss of her son was too much to take for 40-year-old Reshma. She had struggled through the loss of her husband, but this was a shock she may never recover from. He was her ray of hope in life and she was the umbrella of love in his for the last 20 years and now the ferocity of caste had snuffed the life out of this family.

While the mother and Viraj's family suffer the trauma, the police were callous. They refused to register a complaint when the desperate family went to the station on the 7th of June and did so only after the boy died on the 8th of June. It is the death and subsequent pressure from Dalit rights groups that led to an FIR.

The Kate family, like most Maratha caste families, has political support in the area and the police delay in registration of the FIR shows the hold they have over the system. However, pressure from Dalit



groups led to the arrest of Hemant Kate and Sagar Kate on the 8th of June and the other four accused the next day.

While such murders have not been frequent in this area, the boldness of the attack on Viraj shows the deep caste animosity.

Often caste is imposed in discreet and decisive ways in areas where Dalits have reasonable influence. Jagtap Nagar is an area where the Dalits have organised themselves and Viraj came from an economically better-off family. However, none of this could save him from caste anger.

In fact, the Marathas, who own land, construction, and businesses in the area, do not live next to the Dalits and that is testimony to the fact that caste impositions remain strong.

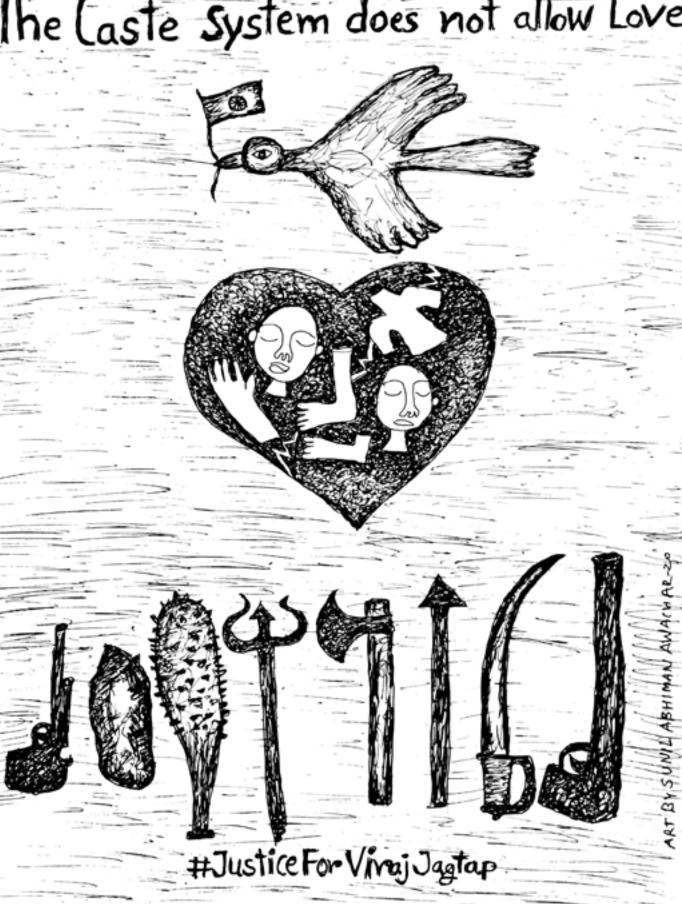
The fight for justice for Viraj and the Jagtap family will be a long and difficult battle and the Manuski Trust, Pune, is spearheading efforts in this case. A team from Manuski visited the family and recorded details of the incident and as the investigating

officers were not responding to the family, they mobilized activists, lawyers and journalists so that the Assistant Commissioner of Police was compelled to ask them to look into the matter.

Manuski team had also discussed the appointment of a Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) and gave Memorandum to Residential District Collector (RDC) regarding appointment of SPP. Efforts in the case will meet resistance from caste groups and Manuski is keeping constant vigil of the progress and is in close touch with the family to ensure that the case remains in focus.

One of the prime demands of the victims and activists is to invoke Section 120B of the IPC in the case. This would ensure that a case of criminal conspiracy is tried against the accused and authorities who refused to act in time. This would also ensure that there is a clear probe to investigate a conspiracy to murder Viraj.

The Caste System does not allow Love



Another key demand is that Call Data Records of the victim and Manisha are enclosed with the FIR and that would reveal if the girl called Viraj or if the Kate family conspired to bring Viraj to the area where they attacked him.

Interestingly, two of the accused were juvenile and released on bail. While the Juvenile Justice Act demands that details of accused be kept confidential, the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act gives the victim the right to have every detail about the proceedings. In this case the two laws seemingly cross paths and there needs to be clarity on which one takes precedence in a case of this nature.

These are all important to ensure that all accused are brought to justice and even the dominant castes know that such a brutal act will have severe retribution.

Image Credits: Sunil Awchar

TThis artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.



Sudhakar and Sharmila were adults who loved each other, but the caste Hindu girl's family opposed the marriage and smashed her lover's head to pieces

he COVID-19 emergency lockdown led to severe hardships for 24-year-old Sudhakar in Chennai. Millions of labourers like him had to deal with the loss of income, food shortages, and uncertainty about their future. Desperate for a livelihood, Sudhakar returned to his village, Morappan Thangal near Arani of Tiruvannamalai district in Tamil Nadu state.

The moment he was back, he wanted to connect with his dearest friend Gopi. They decided to catch up early next morning on 29th of March 2020 to quietly walk and enjoy their reunion. As Sudhakar shared his ups and downs of life, Gopi enquired about Sharmila, his beloved. While Sudhakar was sharing about her desperate pleas asking him to return to the village, they were suddenly confronted by Sharmila's father Murthy and his accomplice Kadiravan.

Murthy shouted at Sudhakar, "How arrogant of you to be in love with my daughter? What is your caste and what is my caste! How can a poor labourer like you dare to love my daughter?"

Kadiravan grabbed Sudhakar's shirt and pushed him down and began verbally abusing him with casteist slurs. Gopi noticed that the men were carrying a hammer and an iron rod and realized that their intent was not to abuse, but to assault and perhaps kill Sudhakar.

He begged them to spare his friend's life, but they wouldn't listen. Instead, they threatened him with death if he came in their way. Sudhakar and Gopi tried to

escape, but they caught Sudhakar, pushed him down and hit him hard on the head and chest with the hammer.

They slammed the hammer at him as if he was a rock, pulverizing the skull, face and chest. The attack was fatal both in intent and action. An autopsy later showed that Sudhakar's skull was crushed to pieces. The lover had been killed by the caste hammer.

Sudhakar belonged to the Kal Oddar caste, which is socially considered to be the lowest among the Most Backward Caste groups. He was in love with Sharmila who belonged to the dominant Vanniyar community and hailed from the nearby Ondikudisai hamlet just a kilometre away from Sudhakar's village. In these parts, Vanniyar caste political outfits are extremely powerful and enforce caste dominance with ferocity.

Sharmila and Sudhakar were in love for over two years and despite ferocious opposition from the girl's family, the two eloped to the nearby Walajahpet town and got married towards the end of 2019. They began living there hiding safely from the girl's family.

Unfortunately, a few months later,
Sharmila's family found the couple and
forcibly brought them back to the village.
A local caste panchayat was hurriedly
called by the dominant castes and it ruled
the marriage null and void, tearing the
couple apart. Sudhakar was punished
with severe physical assault and chased
away from the village.

There are only three families from
Sudhakar's caste in the village and they
dig trenches and pits for sundry works.
None, including Sudhakar's own family,
had the economic or social power to raise
their voice against the diktat of the
Panchayat ruled by Vanniyars.

Like most in the weaker economic and social sections of a feudal society,
Sudhakar's family silently suffered injustice and feared for their life. They knew the caste animosity of the dominant could lead to more violent attacks. They decided to send Sudhakar to Chennai for his own safety and the family's survival.

His parents would go to see him regularly and ensured that he did not come back to the village. Meanwhile, Sharmila's family had arranged to forcibly marry her off. However, Sharmila clandestinely remained in touch with Sudhakar over phone and tried to convince him that she wanted to defy the caste panchayat as she considered him to be her husband.

She was willing to do anything, including braving the caste panchayat, to be reunited with her love and this inspired

Sudhakar to not give up even though he feared his return could be fatal for him.

In several parts of India such love stories are tragic victims of caste hate. Often referred to as honour killings these acts of dishonour, disgust and disempowerment, where a girl and boy from different castes are made to pay with their lives for falling in love, have earned enormous notoriety.

Caste Panchayats (known as Khap Panchayats in North India) are local caste leaderships which serve as judge, jury and executioner in cases of intercaste marriages and mercilessly order these killings in the name of caste honour.

Unfortunately, even the nationwide lockdown imposed to fight the Coronavirus pandemic could not stop caste hate from taking the life of 24 year old M.Sudhakar whose only crime was to fall in love with Sharmila, a girl from a different caste in a village near Arani town in Northern Tamil Nadu.

The accused in the Sudhakar murder case have been booked at Arani Taluk Police Station, Crime No 250/2020, under Sections 341, 294 (b), 302 of the IPC and remanded to judicial custody. But is punishing only Murthy and Kadiravan the route to justice? It certainly is not.

There is no action against caste
Panchayats which dared to declare a
legally registered marriage null and void.
According to social observers these
Panchayats operating as extra judicial



authorities will continue to perpetuate such violence, until there is a fierce action under the law against such practices of horror killings in the name of caste honour.

During the lockdown period alone, Tamil Nadu has witnessed 4 gruesome 'honour' killings. Over the last decade the accused have been convicted in only four cases of honour killings. That means the conviction rate for honour killings is only 3%.

Despite strong judgements from the Supreme Court of India and an order on protection of intercaste couples' confessions in the murder case of Shankar and Pranay from the State of Andhra Pradesh in 2018, honour killings continue unabated. There is also a systemic failure by the centre and state governments to protect vulnerable couples.

Often, the fear of alienating dominant caste voter keeps even rational voices in the establishment silent on the issue. Further, given the hold of dominant castes on the law and order and government machinery, the perpetration of violence in the name of caste goes on unabated.

The National Law Commission came up with a draft calling for a separate law to prevent honour killings; such a law is yet to see the light of day in Parliament.

Young Sudhakar paid with his life for the love in his heart. But he is neither the first nor the last.

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frontline.thehindu.com/dispatches/article31235723.ece Image Credits: DHRDnet



Life was full of horror and tragedies for 14-year-old girl Aanya (name changed) till she died at Hyderabad's Government run Niloufer hospital on the 12th of August 2020 anya was a 14-year-old girl born to Dalit parents who died in a tragic road accident in 2015, when she was just 9. Unable to fend for Ananya, her relatives decided to leave her in the refuge of an orphanage.

They assumed that she would find a livelihood and survive at the Maruthi Orphanage in Ammenpur of Rangareddy district of Telangana which is adjoining the state capital Hyderabad. Little did the family know that it was less of a home for orphans and more a house of horror.

Aanya's ordeal began soon after she had been admitted into the orphanage. A donor for the orphanage, Venugopal Reddy, would visit often and began sexually abusing Aanya. He would lace her juice with sedatives and rape her. She was repeatedly raped for years and all this while the warden at the orphanage, Vijaya, was fully aware of what was happening. Vijaya along with her brother Jayadeep regularly pushed defenceless orphan girls into the hands of sexual predators like Venugopal.

After years of sexual abuse, during the lockdown, Aanya went back to her uncle's house in New Bowenpally area of Hyderabad. She was in a disturbed silence for a few days and was walking with difficulty and pain. Her relatives soon noticed her unusual quietness and her physical discomfort.

They took her to a local hospital where the horror that she had endured came out in the open.

The doctor confirmed that the girl had been raped repeatedly and was mentally devastated. The family approached Hyderabad's Bowenpally police station and an FIR was lodged on the 1st of August, but subsequent action was not swift.

Aanya was examined at the Bharosa centre for women's distress in Hyderabad and gave her statement on the 1st of August. Shockingly, what she revealed exposed an organised sex racket run in the guise of an orphanage.

She said after Venugopal Reddy would sexually abuse her, the other children would help her get dressed and they would see Venugopal paying money to Vijaya. She even revealed that there were other girls who faced the same plight and were raped mercilessly.

Despite the seriousness of the case the Bharosa Centre did not take any further action and asked the relatives to take the child back home.

Eventually, Aanya's relative, Preethi, got a call from the Rangareddy District Child Welfare Committee Chairperson asking her to bring the child to Sakhi Medchal. The rape survivor was produced before a three-member bench on the 3rd August, which included the Chairperson. Preethi asked them to send Aanya back with her, but the CWC Chairperson refused and promised Preethi that the child will be provided proper health care.

After that the three members of CWC, compelled the victim to make some statement which was video recorde.

Later on, this statement of the victim was used as evidence to file a police complaint against the relatives of the victim instead of the real perpetrators of the crime.

These were the very relatives who had protected the victim and given her shelter after the Maruthi Orphanage threw her out during the COVID-19 lockdown.

However, the staff and chairperson of the CWC did not get the child admitted to a hospital and instead took her to an Observation Home at Nimboliadda in the City. This proved to be a fatal lapse. Aanya did not get the medical help she needed for internal injuries that she had suffered.

On the 8th of August, she collapsed. Haemorrhage from her internal wounds were perhaps too much for her ravaged body to take as they went undetected for over a week after she had revealed her ordeal. Her rapidly deteriorating health was the result of sheer callousness by the district CWC and all other authorities.

Aanya was finally rushed to Hyderabad's famous Niloufer Hospital where she struggled for her life and finally breathed her last on 12th of August 2020. The rape survivor would have lived had she received the right medical help a few days earlier. Her relative Preethi had demanded medical help as early as the 1st of August, but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

As she struggled for her life, her case was also struggling from one police station to another. An FIR was initially filed at the Bowenpally police station and later transferred to the Ameenpur police station in which jurisdiction Maruthi Orphanage operated.

Strangely, the district CWC also filed a complaint at Jeedimetla Police station which had no reference to the complaint filed by the victim and registered as FIR No 218/2020 at the Ameenpur police station. All these lapses raise some alarming questions regarding the role of officials.

This apart, while Maruthi Orphanage
Home is located in Ameenpur and
comes under the jurisdiction of the CWC,
in Rangareddy district the chairperson
called and asked for the child to be
produced at Neredmet Sakhi Centre,
which comes under another jurisdiction.
All these actions seem bizarre.

Finally, while the police arrested Venugopal Reddy, Vijaya, and her brother Jaydeep, it was a case of a justice too late for Aanya. There was also delay in seizing call records, registers from the orphanage and the statement of other children living there. All this could have led to evidence tampering by the accused.

The actions of the Rangareddy district CWC needs to be thoroughly investigated and a team of high integrity police officers must be assigned to probe this case thoroughly.

The fact is that this resembled an organised racket and could have had several victims.

A demand for detailed investigation of all children who have lived in the orphanage has also been made and needs to be carried out to protect other potential victims. There is a need to thoroughly investigate the actions of the Bharosa centre and the police as well.

The attitude and callousness of the authorities reflects how victims who are Dalit and poor are treated by the establishment. A similar case belonging to the upper castes would have received much greater attention and action.

Finally, a chargesheet has been filed in the Rangareddy Court but the road to justice remains uncertain.

According to National Crime Report Bureau (NCRB), 1,690 cases of crimes against Dalits were recorded in the State of Telangana in the year 2019. Of these, 187 cases of rape were reported against Dalits, 61 victims were children.

This apart, cases of assault on Dalit women with intent to outrage modesty were 96 in 2019 and there is a backlog of 1446 cases pending investigation.

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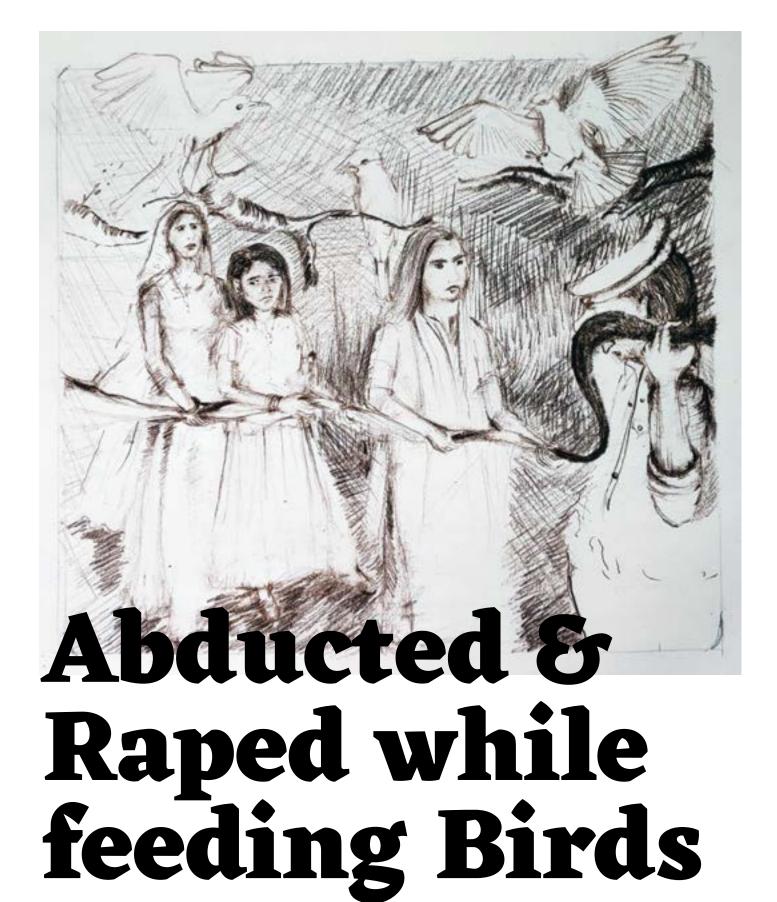
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Image Credit: Alaka Aditi

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.





A child is targeted by 'upper' caste sexual predators who sedate and rape her repeatedly

hirteen year-old Ritu (name changed) loved taking care of animals and birds. The little girl would often feed them water to protect them from the merciless Indian summer which is particularly acute in the arid state of Rajasthan. She was bright, calm and as a class 7 student, excelled in studies.

Ritu's father Pemaram and mother Rajidevi belong to the Scheduled Caste Balai community and earn a livelihood as agricultural labourers in the Bhurera village near Prabatsar town in Nagaur district of Rajasthan. A large part of the state is consumed by the Thar desert and Prabatsar falls in the semi-arid portion.

Pemaram and Rajidevi had worked at a brick kiln in a nearby town, but a few years ago decided to move with their daughter to their home village. Caste impositions are pronounced here and the approximately 70 Dalit families live in a clearly segregated area, away from the dominant Gurjar, Yadav, Rajput, and Brahmin caste families.

Despite their economic status and the poor literacy levels in the state, Ritu's parents ensured the girl pursued her education. She would help them with their household work and go to school. Every evening she would joyfully narrate to her parents the lessons she learned.

However, the lockdown left the schools shut and given the punishing heat in the agricultural fields, Ritu's parents left her in the shelter of their home when they went out to work. Ritu would only venture out to feed water to the birds and animals that come visiting.

On the 19th of May 2020, as the girl filled the pot outside with water, she was snatched away by two 'upper' caste sexual predators on the prowl.

Chenram and Ramdev Yadav, of the powerful Yadav caste, saw Ritu outside her house and asked where her parents were. She told them they had gone to work.

Knowing she had no help the two plotted a horrific crime. They parked their car near the house and one of the accused grabbed the little girl and gagged her mouth. She could not scream or even breathe. He threw her into the car which the other accused had kept ready and running and they sped away.

They drove to a deserted area nearby and drugged the girl. She was semiconscious, and they raped her one after the other. The fact that she was just a young, innocent child did not matter in their merciless urge to violate and overpower her.

They had used some chemical in a rag and forced the girl to smell it making her unconscious.

After raping her repeatedly for hours the men bundled the girl back into the car and dumped her near her house. The girl was in a daze as she walked back home wailing.

Too young to understand what exactly happened but old enough to know that she will be scarred for life.

She reached home and waited for her parents to return, sobbing silently in the solitude of the house. The birds and cattle quenched their thirst and flew away, but the little girl who fed them was drenched in her blood and tears.

When the parents returned home the crying girl told her mother what had happened. It was devastating for the family, but they mustered the courage to complain at the local police station on the 24th of May 2020.

The thought of the police is intimidating to the poor and they feared that a complaint would only lead to harassment of the victim and not justice. However, the other families in the area supported Ritu's parents and they all went to the Parbatsar Police Station.

Like in most other cases of this nature, the police showed little interest in the plight of the victim and her family. They did not file an FIR immediately and this is the reality of a police station and a rape victim despite several apex court orders and laws.

Finally, it was the call of a Dalit rights defender who the family approached for help that led to some movement in the case. The police filed an FIR on the 25th of May 2020, six days after the rape. They conducted a medical examination of the victim and took her statement under

section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code and began an investigation.

Seven more days would pass before the police arrested the accused. The fact that the two men were familiar with the area showed that they were locals and the police finally tracked them down with the help of the rape survivor's description of the car and the rapists.

It is common for Dalit girls to be abducted and raped in these areas of the state.

Several such rapes have been reported in the past and when it is caste Hindu men perpetrating the atrocity the chances of justice are feeble.

Consistent activism by Dalit rights defenders has helped force action in such cases. In this case too, the arrest of the accused was carried out only after repeated follow ups.

The family was not aware of the legal niceties or the SC/ST prevention of atrocities Act hence the police, instead of filing a case under sections from the amended act of 2018, filed it under weaker sections of the outdated 1989 act.

Nyay foundation is the organisation that spearheaded the campaign for justice in this case and DHRD network was informed about this through a Dalit rights defender in the area. There have been consistent follow-ups in the case and higher authorities have been contacted.

Fortunately, all other families in the area where Ritu lives have rallied behind the victim and an awareness campaign has been launched in the area. There is a need for a strong community-based campaign to ensure that children in these areas are protected from such predators and constant support for the family of the rape survivor to pursue the case till its logical conclusion.

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Image Credits: Keerthana C

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.





## Dead

Chandri<mark>kaben</mark> was <mark>murdered in broa</mark>d dayli<mark>ght</mark> <mark>af</mark>ter she<mark> spur</mark>ned th<mark>e sex</mark>ual ad<mark>vanc</mark>es of a<mark>n</mark> <mark>'u</mark>pper' c<mark>aste p</mark>redat<mark>or</mark>

Bikhabhai Danabhai Boricha and his family are amongst the 46 Dalit families living in Charel village in the heart of Gujarat's semi-arid Saurashtra region. His beautiful wife, 27-year-old Chandrikaben, and their two sons lived in a joint family with Bikhabhai's parents and brother Kantibhai.

The family worked hard as agricultural labourers but lived a peaceful life in the small village of around 304 houses and a population of 2000. Charel is located around 95 kilometres from the bustling Rajkot city – the nerve centre of Gujarat politics and the Saurashtra region.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in this area and most of the land is owned by the upper castes. Dalit families here toil hard in the heat to ensure that the dry soil reaps dividends for the landowners. Despite their hard work and sweat, Dalits are abused, and caste division is pronounced in this area.

While Saurashtra region is dominated by the Patel caste, Charel is held by the iron fists of the Darbars. Like the Rajputs, the Darbars claim an entitlement to being rulers and expect all other castes to bow in obedience.

They assert themselves through physical aggression and violent intimidation. Even other powerful castes like the Patels and Rabaris avoid a confrontation with the Darbars for fear of violent retribution. In Charel, most other caste families have left the village due to harassment of the

Jadeja family. Dalit families, mainly from the Vankar community, have nowhere else to flee and endure oppression by Darbars like Yuvraj Singh Pabubha Jadeja.

Despite strong laws, untouchability remains a social practice in these parts of the country and even government allotted benefits do not reach the Dalits. For instance, in 2002, 25 Dalit families were allotted residential land by the Government but the Darbars refused to allow the Dalits access to it. They threatened to kill the Dalits if they demanded their entitlement.

Yuvraj, the name means crown prince, is notorious for harassing and molesting women in the area. He had his eyes set on young Chandrika, but she had managed to stay away from him.

But on the 19th of May 2020, Yuvraj found Chandrika as she was walking to the field along with her aunt Samuben Boricha and other Dalit women.

Women in these parts rarely travel alone, but despite Chandrikaben being with a group of women, Yuvraj began teasing her and suddenly grabbed her hands tightly and refused to let her go. When she tried to free her hand, he threatened, "I will kill you if you do not come with me." Chandrikaben was in tears and desperately trying to free herself and move away. The women around her made desperate pleas to Yuvraj to leave Chandrika but he refused.

As Chandrika continued to resist going with him, suddenly he swung a shovel at her. The metal hit her head and she collapsed on the ground bleeding. The young, shy, and beautiful mother of two was on the ground and in a few moments the injury dowsed the life out of her.

With one blow of his shovel the upper caste sexual predator had taken away the joy from a hardworking and poor Dalit family. But he did not care. He fled the scene without even checking on the plight of the victim and others with her.

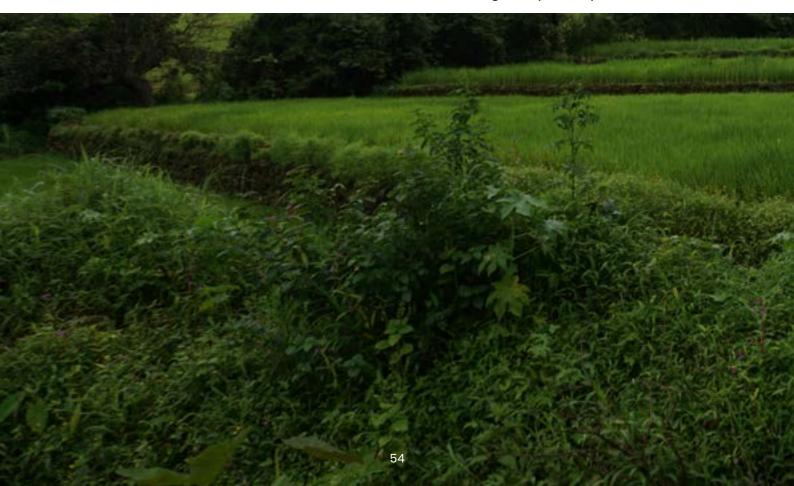
The women ran to Bikhabhai and the husband rushed to the spot only to find his wife's dead body. There was little that was left to be done. The children were inconsolable, they would never feel their mother's touch again.

But could they at least get justice for their mother?

Caste power runs deep in the corridors of power and though Bikhabhai went and filed a police complaint – an FIR was lodged on 19th May 2020 – the Darbars threatened all the Dalits to withdraw the case. They even enforced an economic boycott and threatened to throw the Dalit families out of the village if the complaint was not withdrawn.

Fortunately, the support of the Saurashtra Dalit Sangathan and Dalit Human Rights Defenders (DHRD) ensured that the entire Dalit population remained firmly behind Bikhabhai in the quest for justice. The involvement of activists ensured that the police arrested Yuvraj and the issue was immediately taken up with higher authorities.

Taking the matter to higher authorities has also ensured that the Dalit residents of the area were given police protection.



Taking the matter to higher authorities has also ensured that the Dalit residents of the area were given police protection. However, these measures need to stand the test of time as the Darbars will make every effort to intimidate the witnesses and scuttle the case.

In Rajkot district, Saurashtra Dalit Sangathan (SDS) has been spearheading Human Rights issues and has made progress on land rights for Dalits. It was through one of the block levels volunteer that SDS learnt about this incident and, despite the lockdown, members from the SDS contacted authorities and started supporting the family.

In this case, due to the lockdown the SDS top team could not go and meet the victim's family in person. However, other measures to ensure that the case is not weakened by the authorities have been

taken. A demand for a special Public Prosecutor has been made in the case, as per legal counsel provided by DHRD.

Apart from punishing the accused, it is essential to ensure that Dalit families in the area are given equal treatment and their rightful entitlements, like Government residential plots, need to be delivered despite caste barriers. This is a long process which SDS volunteers and DHRD have taken up as a major objective.

As far as the case is concerned, legal support is needed for the trial process and that consumes both financial and physical resources. But justice for Chandrika is not just about this one case. It should be about altering the social reality of all Dalit families in the region.

Representational Image Credits: Previous spread: Sudhark Olwe Below: Shone Satheesh

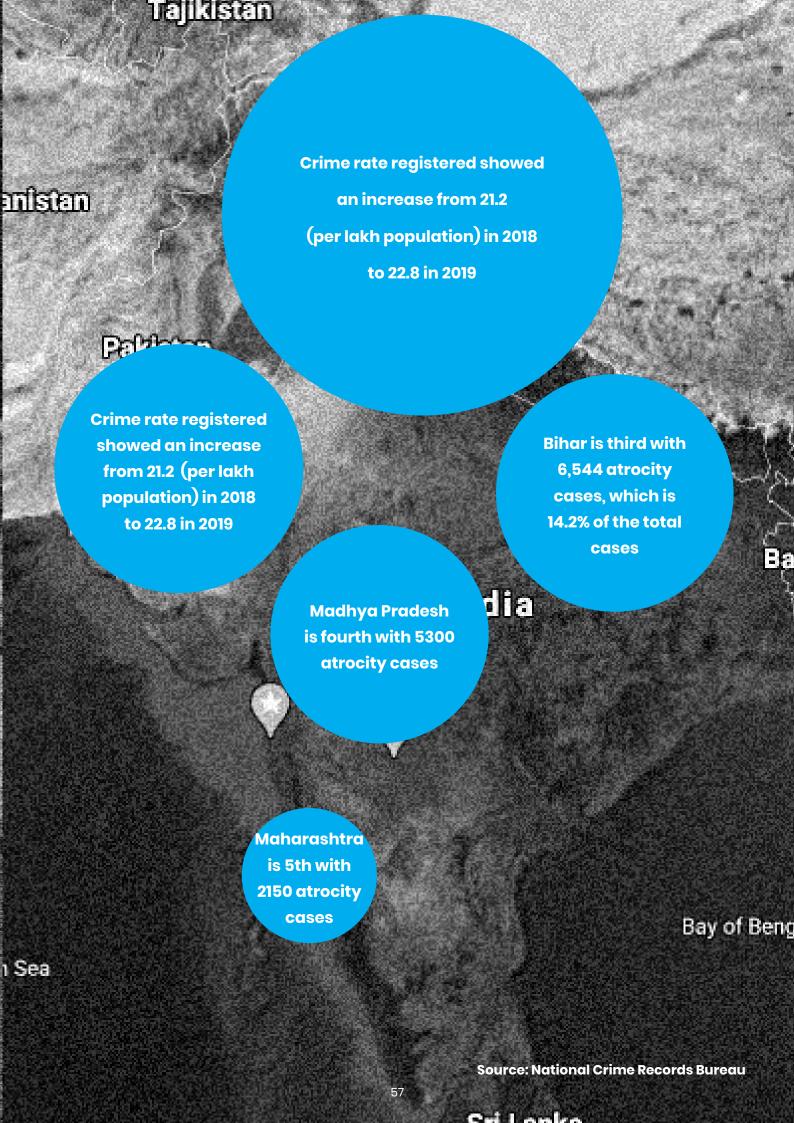


## Crime Rates

45,935 crimes were
committed in 2019
against Dalits, one every
12 minutes across India
representing 7.3% rise
from the previous year

Crime rate registered showed
an increase from 21.2 (per
lakh population) in 2018
to 22.8 in 2019

The rate of atrocity cases per lakh population was highest in Rajasthan at 55.6, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 46.7 followed by Bihar at 39.5, followed by Gujarat at 34.8 and followed by Telangana at 31.1



# Right to Property Violated by the Castes

Dinkar and his mother were beaten up by his 'upper' caste neighbour and the police, village officials offered little help



fter he lost his father a few years ago, the burden of being the breadwinner for the family fell on 24-year-old Dinkar Waghmare.

The boy and his mother, 50-year-old Chandrakala, lived in a semi constructed house that his father left behind for them at the Hasanabad village in Jalna district of Maharashtra.

It was just a two-room house in a small plot of land with no electricity connection, but it was their own and since the mother and son could not afford to pay rent anywhere else, they conditioned themselves to live in it.

They had only basic water supply and sanitation but what they had in abundance was caste friction.

Dinkar's house was surrounded by houses belonging to 'upper' caste families, including those from the dominant Maratha community, and the neighbours have often demanded that the Dalit family move out of the area.

However, Dinakar and his mother stayed on.

Dinkar worked at a factory in the nearby Bhokardan town where several others from his Scheduled Caste Matang community worked. It was a tough life of a factory worker and he would start work by 9 AM and finish only by 8 PM. Long working shifts was the only way he could earn enough money to make ends meet.

Despite living a tough life, he is a cheerful and chatty young man who was inspired by the dream of social equality; the vision of the man who drafted the Indian
Constitution. Dr.Babashaeb Ambedkar.

Hasanabad is an economically backward village of Maharashtra with a population of around 6,000 and Dinkar hoped that with his hard work and own house he could help carve a decent life for himself and his mother.

Caste divisions are so pronounced in this area that the dominant castes only interact with the Dalits when they want them to work on their agricultural fields or shops. The Marathas own most of the land and money-lending business.

Other castes like Lohars are mainly focussed on farming. The Dalits, mainly from the Matang community, work as labourers in the fields and factories.

Even the shop that distributed ration in the village is owned by the dominant castes and the Dalits have to wait till the other castes are given their supplies to access their basic ration. These are issues Dinkar and his mother endured, like all other Dalits.

The Maratha caste Madekar family which lives next to Dinkar's house had been trying to encroach into Dinkar's housing plot by making some temporary constructions. Chandrakala noticed the encroachment and politely requested the Madekars to not encroach on her land, but they refused to listen. With only 3 graduates from the community, the Dalits do not have the social and political mobilisation to challenge the castes in the village and Dinkar's case is testimony to their plight.

The encroachment began getting worse during the nationwide lockdown and the Madekars began abusing Chandrakala on the 6th of July.

Knowing that any direct confrontation with the Madekars could lead to violence and further casteist abuse, Dinkar went to the village Sarpanch, who is also an 'upper' caste, with his problem. But the Sarpanch refused to even meet the Dalit boy.

When Dinkar returned home he saw 40-year-old Gajanan and his 60-year-old mother Sumanbai Dagdoba Madekar verbally abusing his mother Chandrakala. Dinkar came to defend his mother and demanded that the Madekars stop the verbal abuse.

Like in most such caste atrocities, the verbal abuse soon turned into a physical assault. The dominant Marathas could not tolerate that a Dalit family would stand up to them and stop them from encroaching. Gajanan hit Dinkar on the head and the young man fell on the ground. Hearing the commotion several neighbours in the area rushed in and that's the only reason the physical assault came to an end. Even as the neighbours were physically restraining Gajanan, he threated Dinkar and said, "Just wait, I will kill you".

A bleeding Dinkar could not even be taken to hospital as the lockdown was in full force and there were no vehicles outside. Fortunately, the he survived the injury and lived to tell his tale and fight for

justice. He filed an FIR at the local police station on the 7th of July.

This was not the first case of caste abuse that Dinkar and Chandrakala have experienced.

Another Maratha in the locality Anand Gadekar had encroached into an open land belonging to the village Panchayat and that blocked the entry into Dinkar's house. While Dinkar had to take a longer path to his home because of the encroachment, no one, including the village panchayat, questioned it.

Such harassment, the 'upper' castes hope, will force the Dalit family out of the area but Dinkar and his mother have remained firm and stayed on.

Initially, when Dinkar complained to the police about the assault there was no action taken, but later, after repeated demands, an FIR was filed. However, no action has been taken against the accused and while the FIR has invoked some sections of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, it has omitted stronger sections that ought to have been invoked.

In fact, the police inspector at Hasanabad has been cold to the victim and even told him once that the house did not belong to Dinkar's father. The gram panchayat and all local authorities have refused to help Dinkar and Chandrakala.

With only 3 graduates from the community, the Dalits do not have the social and political mobilisation to challenge the castes in the village and Dinkar's case is



Even efforts to meet senior officials have not led to any progress in the case. Dinkar feels that all this proves that the, "administration is working more towards protecting Caste hierarchy than providing justice for Dalits".

Kapil Shivsharan of the Centre for
Development and Social Justice Studies
along with Manuski has helped the victim
approach various police authorities.
They have helped draft and submit
applications to relevant authorities and
the State Scheduled Caste Commission
has ordered an inquiry into the matter
and sought an explanation from the District Superintendent of Police.

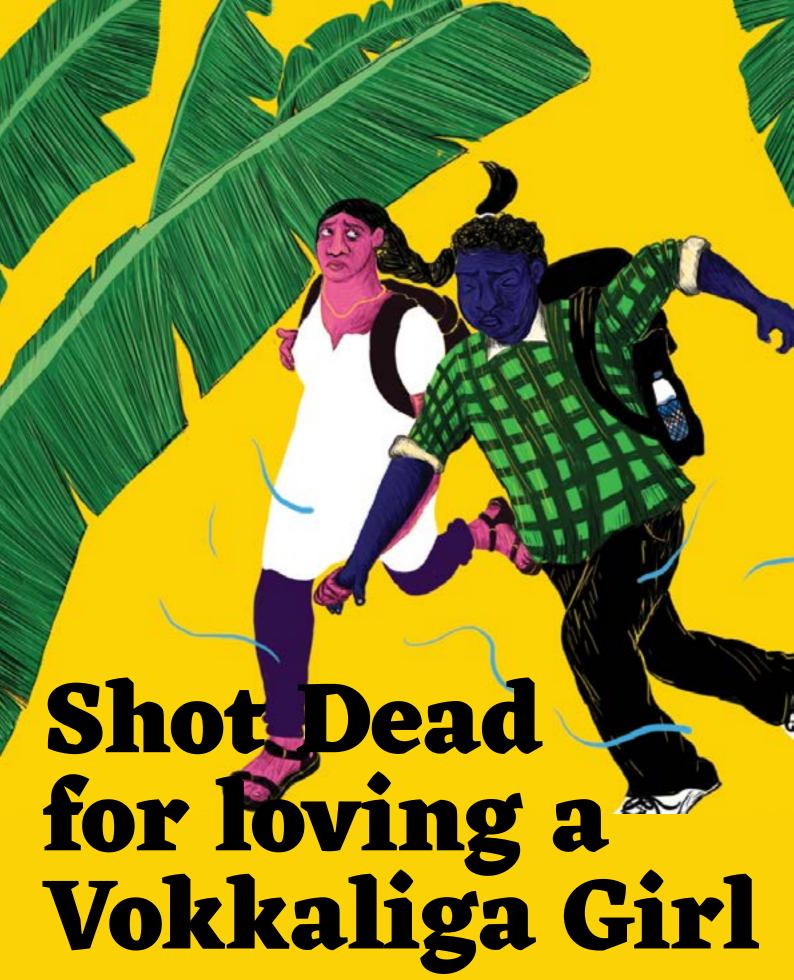
One of the most important issues that need to be addressed in the case is to ensure that stricter sections of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities act are included in the FIR. For instance, only sections 3(1) (r)

and (s) have been included but the crime demands the inclusion of 3(1) (f) and (g) which relate to physical assault and intimidation.

It is a shame that even five months after the incident the accused have not been arrested and there is no protection for the victim, it is a gross miscarriage of justice. There must be pressure on the Gram Panchayat to protect the right to property of Dalits in the area and ensure that Dinkar gets the relevant records for the land that was rightfully owned by his father.

There is also a need for police protection and ensuring that other such issues in the area are addressed with alacrity.

Image Credits: Ajinkya Dekhane



Since the 'upper' caste girl would not obey her family and stay away from Madhu, the family killed the Dalit boy to end the relationship

Il her life, Shivamma struggled to make ends meet and ensure that her two sons – Madhu and Manu – had enough food to eat and a basic education. Their father had deserted the family and it was the mother who was both the breadwinner and sole protector of the boys.

The three of them stuck with each other through the best and worst of times at the Soppinahalli village in Alur Taluk of Karnataka's Hassan district. Caste divisions are powerful and enforced ferociously in this agrarian area which falls under the Old Mysore region of the State and as Dalits, Madhu, Manu and Shivamma were conscious of caste brutality.

However, the power of teenage love is such that it is blind to the threats of caste and rules of law. Madhu was in his early 20s when he fell in love with Rekha, who was yet to turn 18. The girl, who belonged to the dominant caste, reciprocated his feelings.

The couple knew that the girl's family would not allow her to marry a Dalit boy and would go to any extent to tear them apart. The couple broke the law when they decided to elope two years ago.

Since the girl was a minor at that time, her angry family filed a case under the stringent Protection of Children Against Sexual Offenses Act 2012 (POCSO) against Madhu. Irrespective of whether Madhu and Rekha were in love, eloping with a minor girl is a serious crime.

Madhu was arrested and he spent a few months in jail. His ageing mother and brother moved pillar to post and took the case to the courts. The family spent all its savings and borrowed money for legal expenses and finally the court granted bail for Madhu.

Though he was released, Shivamma knew that her older son could turn into a target for dominant castes at any point of time. She and her younger son Manu convinced Madhu to find safe refuge in Bengaluru and stay away from the village.

Madhu struggled to survive in the bustling metropolis but managed to get a job and make ends meet. He even managed to send some money back home to his mother and brother. However, the lockdown threw his life out of gear yet again. He had no work in the city and could not stay on.

With no other option, Madhu returned to Soppinahalli in April and took up a job at a local workshop. Shivamma, who works as a cleaner at a hotel, was happy to have both her sons back home. But her happiness would be short-lived.

She and Manu had told Madhu categorically not to talk to Rekha.

They knew the slightest provocation could lead to a massive retaliation.

The nervousness was a constant subtext to the joyful reunion and moments of togetherness that the mother and her two sons enjoyed.

On the 15th of July, Madhu, who had settled into the village routine, headed to the local temple with a couple of his friends. On their way back they were suddenly stopped by Rekha's uncle Roopesh. Little did anyone expect that things would turn bloody in a few seconds.

Roopesh pulled out a country made double-barrel gun used in hunting and from point blank range fired into Madhu. The boy writhed in pain and fell to the ground. The tragic incident unfolded within a span of minutes at around 3.15 PM and Madhu's friends were too stunned to react.

The gun shots were so loud and powerful that it sent tremors through the serene rural setting and killed Madhu instantly. His body lay motionless on the fields as his shocked friends watched blood ooze out.

Shivamma and Manu were devastated when they heard the tragic turn of events. They struggled to grapple with the reality that Madhu would not return home after a simple visit to seek the gods because caste had permanently silenced a loved brother and son.

It is not clear what triggered Roopesh's anger. After the incident, Manu told news reporters that he had specifically told his brother not to speak to Rekha and was not sure if the two had got in touch. A grieving Shivamma too had told Madhu not to get in touch with the girl and thought he had not.

However, Rekha was by now a major and the law would be on her side if she

decided to walk out of her family. Madhu and Rekha got back in touch with each other and that possibly triggered the girl's family into plotting the boy's murder.

The sheer brazenness with which Rooopesh gunned down Madhu in broad daylight and in the presence of his friends goes to show that the intent was to send a message of fear; unlike an act committed in a fit of rage.

The Vokkaliga caste dominates the politics of this region and aggressively assert their identity. The murder of Madhu, in broad daylight, was, perhaps, to send a message of fear to all Dalit families in the area.

"A month ago, Rupesh had openly said he would kill Madhu if he ever tried to talk to the girl again. We did not approach the police then. But, now he has done this," said Madhu's brother Manu according to a report in The Hindu published on the 16th of July.

Manu and Shivamma have embarked on a long road to justice for their murdered son. Roopesh and his father Shive Gowda have been named as accused in a case filed at the Alur police station and sections under IPC and the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities act have been invoked.

Only 0.4% convictions are achieved in SC/ST cases. As of March 2020, of the 9,702 cases reported, only 46 have led to conviction, according to the Gauri Lankesh news site which tracks issues pertaining to Dalit rights closely.

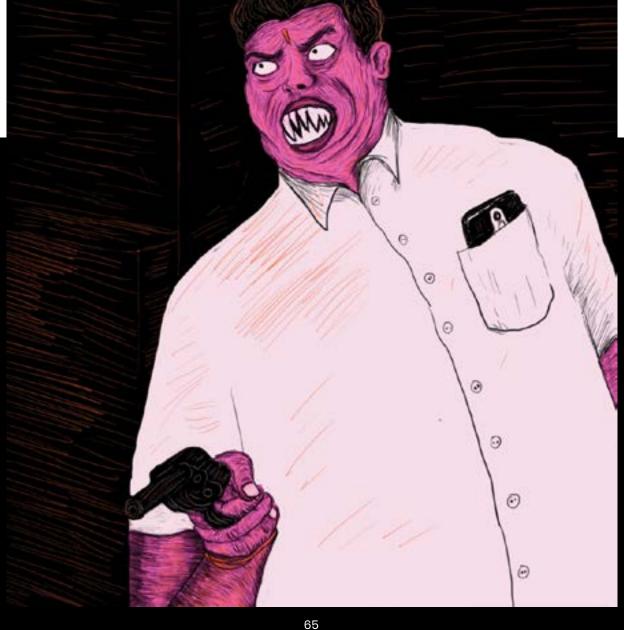
NCRB data also suggests that crimes against SC/ST to population ratio is highest in Karnataka. While Uttar Pradesh reported the most cases in 2019 in terms of absolute number (2,309 cases and 2358 victims), the rate of cases-5.6% per one lakh population of SC and ST people—was less than half of that of Karnataka, which was at least a whopping 12.8% for every one lakh people (1,298 cases and 1,520 victims).

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Image Credits: Shrujana Niranjani Shridhar This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.



## Ambedkar T-shirt, No Protection from Indignity!

Policeman beats and flogs a young engineer in public for speaking to a caste Hindu girl



octor Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, among the greatest leaders of modern India, is revered as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equality and protection against exploitation for every Indian citizen.

The tragic reality though is that a T-shirt with Ambedkar's face on it as an assertion of a Dalit identity and quest for social equality provoked the wrath of a caste Hindu police man on a young Dalit engineer in Tamil Nadu.

20-year-old Gauthamapriyan belongs to the Tokkavadi village near Chengam town in Tamil Nadu's northern Tiruvannamalai district. Polarization on caste lines is a strong social feature of this area which has had powerful influence of caste based political outfits and parties.

Gauthamapriyan's family has struggled through social structures to embrace progress through the power of education. His father Arumugam is a fitness teacher at a Government aided school and had ensured that Gauthamapriyan received the best of education and emerged a successful engineer.

Unfortunately, being educated did not save Gauthamapriyan from being a victim of caste hate and feudal mind set. All he did was talk to a caste Hindu girl in public and once that caught the attention of Eeswaran, a policeman from the girl's caste, the boy was subject to public humiliation, physical and verbal abuse.

On 31st March 2020 at around 4.00 pm Gauthamapriyan dropped his sister at their uncle's home and was returning on a motorcycle. On his way he noticed Ramya, a friend of his, waiting for a bus at a stop near the village of Pudupalayam.

Ramya belongs to a dominant caste
Hindu community, but them being friends,
Gauthamapriyan stopped to talk to her.

Suddenly, Eeswaran, a local policeman from the same caste as Ramya, arrived at the scene and began questioning the boy. He was in plain clothes and not in uniform. Enraged to see that the girl was jovially talking to the boy, Eeswaran demanded to know where Gauthamapriyan was from and began a rude interrogation.

To the eyes of a policeman it must have been obvious, from the T-shirt, that Gauthamapriyan was Dalit. In these parts of Tamil Nadu, irrespective of education or financial standing, a Dalit boy having even a friendly conversation with a caste Hindu girl can have violent reprisal.

The policeman turned aggressive and asked Gauthamapriyan, "Who are you to talk casually with our caste girl?" and the perplexed boy answered calmly that he knew the girl and he hails from Tokkavadi colony (a known area where Dalits reside).

Eeswran began getting more aggressive and abusive. "How dare you talk to my caste girl, you son of a pariah bitch," he shouted and dragged Gauthamapriyan by his T-Shirt, the one featuring the face of Dr Ambedkar.

As the public gathered, the policeman slapped and kicked the young boy mercilessly. A crowd of around 80 people stood as mute witnesses as the policeman flogged the boy with a wire cable. The entire incident was caught on a cell phone camera by a 7th standard boy who had gathered with the crowd. Even the presence of cameras and witnesses did not deter the caste animosity of the law enforcer and the physical and verbal abuse of Gauthamapriyan went uninterrupted.

Pictures of a desperate Gauthamapriyan pleading for mercy and made to kneel on the ground are irrefutable evidence of the atrocity. It shook the faith of the boy's family in the system and their belief that education would emancipate them from social torture.

The question here is not merely of this police brutality and caste atrocity, but if this is the treatment meted out to a young, educated Dalit what would be the plight of the uneducated and weaker sections of the population?

Irrefutable evidence from the cell phone video recording of the incident was instrumental in galvanizing public opinion and legal action against the accused. Evidence, an organisation that works for the rights of Dalits and other socially weaker sections, spearheaded the campaign for justice in this case. The video clip was widely shared on social media and even main stream news networks in the state.

It led to public outcry against the fact that a policeman would perpetrate such a heinous humiliation and abuse of a citizen in full public glare. All this in front of the photo of the father of the constitution on the boy's T-shirt added to the irony and emotional appeal for justice. Civil society organizations from around the state joined the march for justice.

Investigations revealed that policeman Eeswaran was on leave at the time of the incident and so his actions were not ones taken on duty. A case was filed at the Chengam police station under sections 386/2020, 294 (b) and 324 of the IPC and under sections 3 (2) (VA), 3 (1) (r) of the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Violence Prevention Amendment Act 2015.

As per law, cases under the SC/ST
Violence Prevention Amendment Act 2015
are non bailable offences and enforce
strict punishment.

In July, a bail petition filed by Eeswaran at the Thiruvannamalai District and Session Court was dismissed and the court ordered his immediate arrest.

Following this, Eeswaran was remanded to custody and despite attempts by caste groups to covertly help the accused, the public scrutiny and diligent work of civil society groups has ensured that there is no manipulation of the case.

Complaints have been lodged with eight government agencies, including the Director General of Police, the Chief Secretary and the National Human Rights Commission, asking them to file a case under section 3 (2) (7) and not to release him on bail since he has been involved in caste-based violence as a civil servant.

The issue at stake here is not just one of violence against a Scheduled Caste but also of police brutality. Tamil Nadu has seen several cases of custodial deaths and police brutality where the men and women entrusted to protect the law and uphold the constitution end up being the ones abusing their power.

While the public outcry and hard evidence led to action in this case, there are hundreds of cases where officers of the law get away after perpetrating atrocities, caste-instigated or otherwise.

The horrendous Satankulam case from the southern Thoothukudi district is a painful reminder of all that can go wrong. A father and son – Jayaraj and Phoenix – were beaten to death by the police at the Sathankulam police station in June this year.

It led to a massive national outcry for justice and for the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, 5 policemen involved in a crime had been charged with murder and were remanded. The outcry and public scrutiny after Satankulam case was one reason why Eeswaran was denied bail in Gauthamapriyan's case.

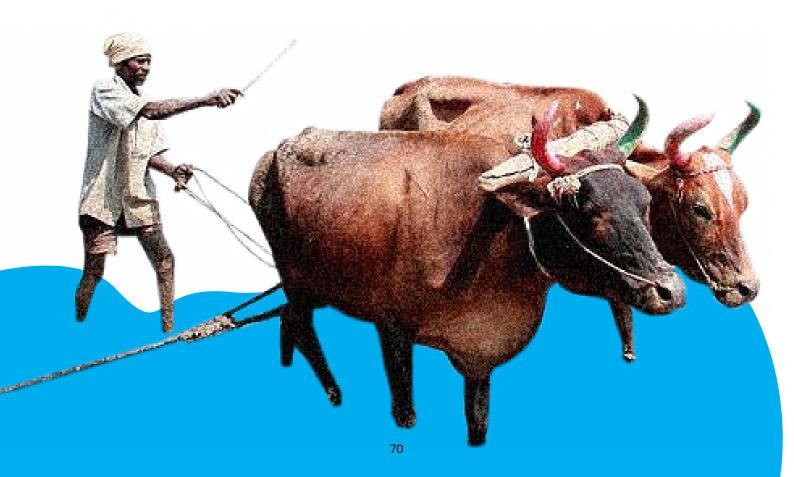
Image Credit: Illustrations by Ajinkya Dekhane

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti
social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.



## Death Penalty for Mid-day Leave

He was unwell and left from farm work in the afternoon, the landlord humiliated, assaulted and killed him by the evening



avi worked tirelessly on the fertile soils of Keelathiruppalakkudi village near Mannargudi town in Thiruvarur district of the Cauvery Delta region in Tamil Nadu. As a poor Dalit labourer, Ravi did not own land and would work on the lands owned by Illavarasan, a dominant caste landlord from the same village.

The work hours were gruelling, literally from dawn to dusk without a break.

He would tirelessly work from 6.30 AM to 6.30 PM irrespective of heat, rain or physical fatigue. Labourers here are clocked and paid by the hour and treated like machines. If you miss an hour of work you miss pay and could face punishment.

With a picture-perfect family of four to feed, Ravi worked tirelessly day in and day out at Illavarasan's field. He would return home to his caring wife Anusia and two daughters 9-year-old Nirmala Devi and 7-year-old Saranya after a day of gruelling work. The smile on their faces made the punishing work routine worth its while. The wages were 35 rupees for an hour of work that amounted to around 400 rupees a day. Since this was seasonal labour, Ravi had to not miss a single day of work to earn just about enough to make ends meet. It is a little more than the wages promised under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, but the work routine is also far more punishing.

There are no labour laws, social security for this kind of work; it is literally at the whim and fancy of the master landlord.

Like every day, on the 24th of May 2020, Ravi came to work at 6.30 am. However, as the sun hit its peak Ravi began having a headache. He struggled on till he could no longer take the pain and returned home at 1.30 pm. He took some medication for the headache and fell asleep.

Waking up after a forced rest he felt better and decided to venture out of the house. He went to a nearby restaurant to buy dinner for his children around 7.30 PM. Illavarasan, the landlord for whom Ravi worked and his friends Raj and Shankar saw Ravi at the restaurant and started abusing him for leaving work mid-day and called him a "labourer dog!" They even used insulting casteist slurs to abuse him.

Ravi who had just been relieved of a bad headache and had rested well was very polite and simply requested them to cut his wages for the hours he missed at work. He only appealed to them to speak to him respectfully.

But ferocious caste Hindus, like Illavarasan, do not like Dalits demanding basic human dignity or respect. What followed was merciless physical assault on Ravi. The landlord and his friends began to hit Ravi with coconut husks and stones.

Every part of his body was bruised, but years of hard labour had made Ravi's body strong and he endured their assault. Ravi retaliated by threatening to complain to the police about this assault and that infuriated his assaulters further.

To the casteist landlord, a Dalit should silently suffer and one who threatened to seek justice must be silenced for life. They dragged Ravi to a 30-feet deep waterless dry well in the area, threw him inside, and left him there to die.

But Ravi refused to let his life go. Perhaps, the thought of his wife and daughters kept him alive at the bottom of a well through a dark night. The next morning, people came to know of what had happened and found an almost dead Ravi in the well.

He was rushed to the Mannargudi Government Hospital and later shifted to the Thiruvarur Government Hospital for more treatment. But the injuries were too brutal even for strong Ravi and he finally breathed his last at 12.30 pm. As horrific as this incident is, it was neither reported widely in the press nor did it turn into a national demand for justice.

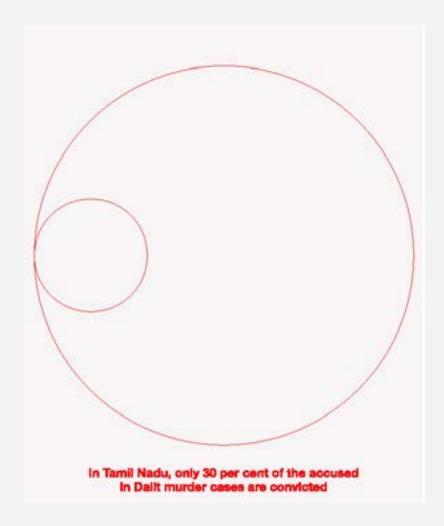
The pristine and fertile Cauvery delta region has unfortunately been the field for caste atrocities and violence on several other occasions. In fact, one of the worst largescale massacres of Dalits in Independent Indian history was recorded in Kilvenmani village of Nagapattinam district at the tail end of the Cauvery delta region.

44 protesting Dalits were killed by landlords in 1968 and the event was a moment of infamy in history that led to a sharp focus on Dalit rights and caste atrocities. However, five decades later caste killings continue around the state and in the delta region. 39-year-old Ravi was one more name added in the year 2020 to the endless list of victims. He was abused, beaten, because he couldn't complete a gruelling day's work on an agricultural field. And, when he protested and demanded respect he was beaten further and left to die in an open well. It is, sadly, one more murder in the history of caste violence on the fertile fields of agrarian districts like Thanjavur, Thiruvaraur and Nagapattinam.

Cases were filed against the accused at the Mannargudi police station under Sections 437/2020 Sections 294 (b), 324, 307, 302 of the IPC and Section 3 (1) (r), 3 (1) (s), 3 (2) (VA) of the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Violence Amendment Act 2015.

Illavarasan and his friends were arrested and remanded to judicial custody, but justice for Ravi's family will be a long and arduous road. Anusia will have to survive without the sole breadwinner for the family and the two young girls will grow up in a world without the shelter of a father.

Further, in cases like this one, with little public attention and focus, the end result is uncertain. In Tamil Nadu, only 30 per cent of the accused in Dalit murder cases are convicted. Even in these cases the reasons for sentencing given by the judges are 'personal rivalry' and not 'caste hatred'. Judgments given on the basis of caste violence are less than 3 percent.



In the case of Dalit murders, 97 per cent of the cases are not filed in a timely manner. 49% of offenders never get arrested.

For example, if a gang of 5 commits a murder only 2 or 3 are arrested. Usually, the henchmen get arrested and the powerful obtain either anticipatory bail or escape prosecution completely. Reports suggest that 95 percent of police investigations are conducted with discrimination.

In addition, there is a provision in the law to provide government employment or a pension of Rs 5,000 per month or agricultural land to the victim's family in case of murder. Though the pension has been said to be paid to a decent number of people the government jobs are given only to less than 5%.

Ravi's case is one of 20 caste killings in Tamil Nadu during the lockdown from March 25 to July 30. The demand for justice is for each and every one of these cases, but the delivery of it is uncertain without a sustained campaign against caste-based crimes.

Image Credits:

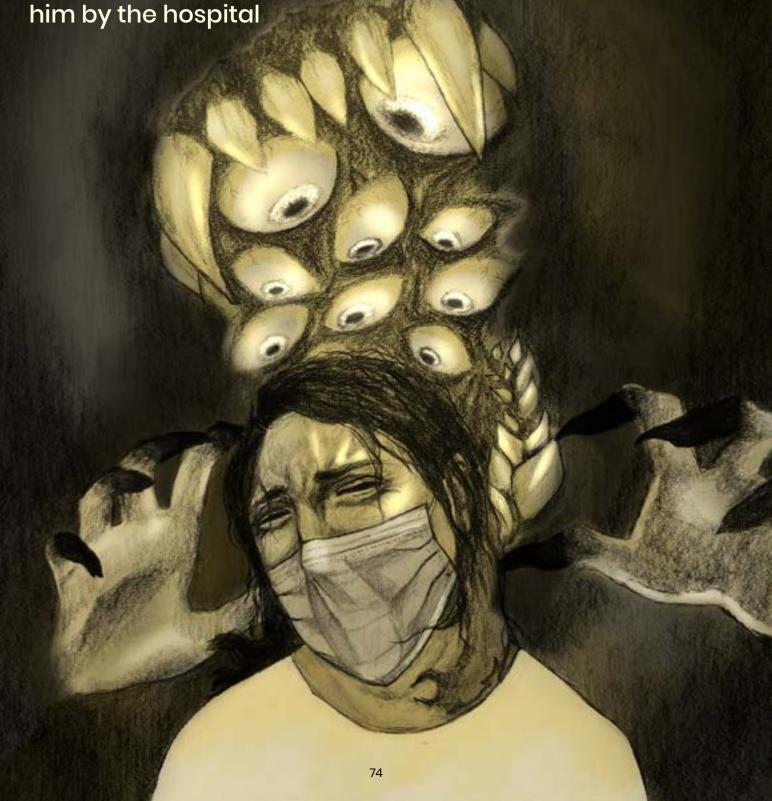
Previous Spread: Wikimedia

Above: Yogesh Barve.

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.

### A Crime in An Ambulance

An ambulance driver with a criminal record rapes a helpless COVID patient after she is sent alone with



ndia's southern state of Kerala received the country's first COVID-19 case and led the way in the fight against the pandemic. Much before the rest of the country, Kerala ensured focussed testing followed by contact tracing and isolation.

However, the horrific case of 19-year-old Rupali (name changed), a Dalit girl, left an indelible blackmark on the state's record and conscience. Rupali had tested positive for COVID-19 and was under treatment in her hometown Adoor near Pathanamthitta in southern Kerala.

Since she began showing symptoms the doctors at the small health care facility in Adoor did not want to take any chances and decided to shift her to a bigger and more well-established facility in the nearby Pandalam area.

A twenty-minute drive to Pandalam is organised daily for patients from Adoor. The trusted ambulance service is the government contracted 108 Kanivu service. Ambulance drivers, like thousands of health workers, have been at the forefront in the battle against the pandemic and the ones in Kerala have been celebrated on many occasions.

So, when 29-year-old Noufal arrived with the ambulance to transfer Rupali, on the night intervening the 6th and 7th of September, there was little doubt in the minds of the doctors or the patient. Due to shortage of ambulances and burn-out amongst drivers, the contractors had been hiring drivers in a haste and failed to do thorough background checks.

Therefore, Noufal, who is wanted in a culpable homicide case in Kayamkulam areas of the state, could get the job as an ambulance driver.

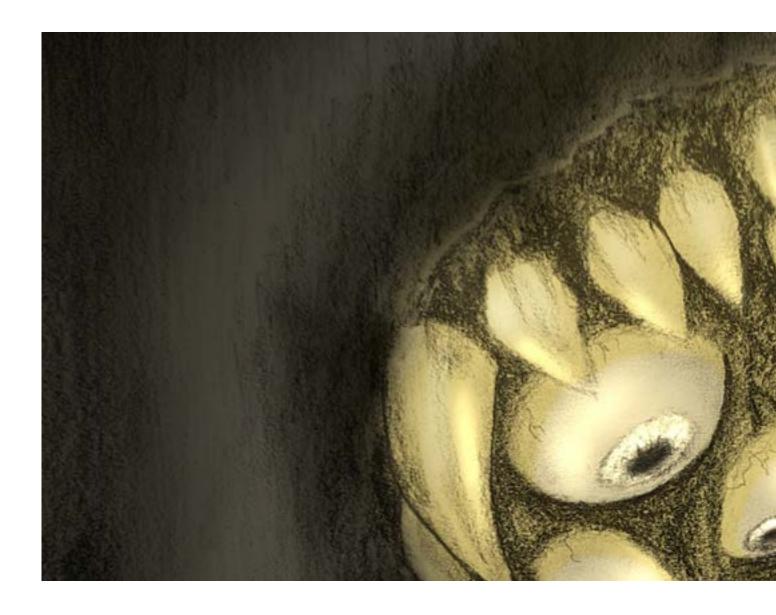
The shortage of ambulances also led to the practice of sending two or three patients together to be dropped at different facilities on the way. In Noufal's ambulance, Rupali and another 42-year-old lady who had tested positive for Covid-19 were sent. The older lady had to be taken to the district hospital in Kozhencherry.

While Kozhencherry is further away from the hospital Rupali was supposed to be dropped at, the driver Noufal went first to drop the older lady. Both patients were in a daze and an unsuspecting Rupali thought it was an error. So she quietly remained in the vehicle when the older woman disembarked.

She had no idea that she was alone in the ambulance with a wanted criminal, and Noufal had plotted a sinister crime in his head.

After leaving Kozhencherry, he took a detour to an empty plot in the Aranmula area. He knew the area like the back of his hand and chose a deserted spot for the horrific crime. All this while Rupali was in the back of the ambulance and had no clue where she was being taken.

He stopped the car and forced himself on Rupali, who was in an extremely vulnerable state due to the Coronavirus. Her screams echoed in the air but there



Noufal raped Rupali repeatedly at the secluded spot, and the girl had little strength to fight him. He drove the ambulance to the Pandalam health care facility and left her there. He told her not to reveal the incident and vanished.

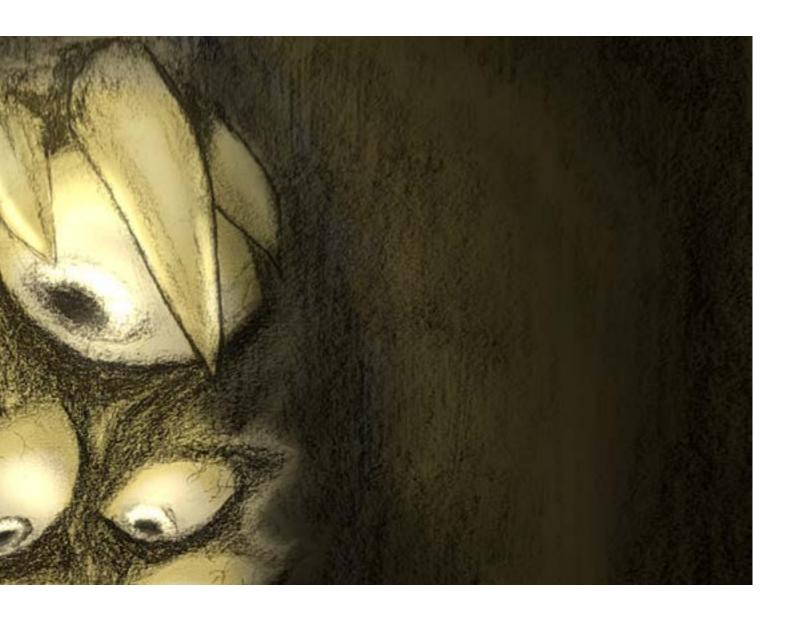
Rupali was in shock and incessantly sobbing as she narrated her ordeal to the health care staff at the hospital. They called the local police who traced the location of the ambulance and arrested Noufal. An FIR under stringent sections of the IPC and SC/ST PoA 2019 was filed.

Fortunately, Noufal was nabbed before another victim fell prey to the sexual

predator. The incident sent shockwaves in Kerala and led to massive protests.

As a state, Kerala is perceived to be more progressive than many other states on human rights issues, but caste still plays an important role in society. However, the rape of a Corona patient, by an ambulance driver, infuriated the state. The administration had failed to follow protocol and allowed a young woman to go alone in the ambulance with the driver, without any safety measures.

The protests highlighted the alleged violation of protocol by the District Medical Office in sending a woman



patient without escort. There were also serious questions raised about the hiring of ambulance drivers without a proper background check.

Even the State Women's commission took suo moto cognisance of the matter and ordered strict action against the accused. But even as the process for justice for Rupali was being scripted by the law, Rupali was struggling to deal with the trauma.

While she was in quarantine at the hospital, the broken girl tried to commit suicide. Fortunately, the medical staff thwarted her attempt and rescued her.

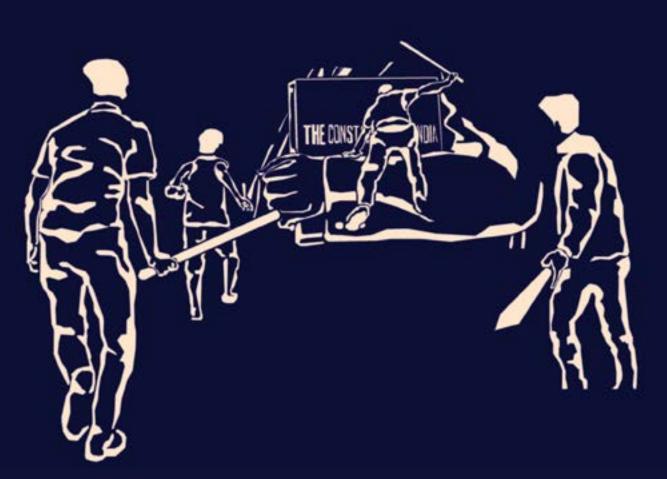
While politics over the rape led to an exchange between the government and the opposition, young Rupali is still struggling to come to terms with the turn of events.

Image Credits: Kanishka Zico

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.

# When The Defenders Are Attacked

They bear the brunt of caste brutality as they challenge caste structures and question atrocities



for any cause is not new, but the brazenness and animosity with which attacks against Dalit and Human rights activists are carried out is alarming. During the lockdown several cases were recorded in Tamil Nadu and they revealed both the ruthlessness with which a Dalit challenging the social structure is attacked and the vehemence with which dominant castes want to thwart a revolutionary Dalit voice. Two amongst those cases are recorded below.

30-year-old Sasikumar is a student of law at the prestigious Dr. Ambedkar Law College in Chennai but in his home town he had to painfully endure the lawlessness of the dominant castes and realised that equality, guaranteed to him under the Constitution, doesn't always exist in reality.

During the lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic Sasikumar, like thousands of other students, returned to his home at Vasurampatti village in the central Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu. His family belongs to the Scheduled Caste Arundhathiyar and while the community struggles with literacy rates, Sasikumar's family was proud that he was studying to be a lawyer.

In fact, Sasikumar had studied manufacturing engineering and is married, but turned to law as he wanted to take up social causes. He was a fiery advocate of human rights and equality. An active voice on Facebook and other

social media platforms with respect to Dalit issues. Sasikumar has made several assertions on the need to throw away caste order and has aggressively posted messages against caste hegemony by the founder of the Dravidian movement Periyar and the architect of the Indian Constitution Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Is it a crime to post messages of revolutionary leaders who scripted Indian history? To the casteist mind such progressive thoughts, a proud assertion of Dalit identity and demand for overthrow of caste hegemony, is unacceptable.

Having got a bounty vacation from college, Sasikumar was enjoying his stay at home. He was taking a morning stroll with his friend Sakthivel on the 8th of May 2020 when suddenly a group of caste Hindus led by Gopi aka Gopinath stopped them.

The OBC Gownder caste, also known as Kongu Vellalar Gownder, is the dominant caste in the western parts of Tamil Nadu, including Namakkal district. The predominantly land-owning caste, like all others in India, enforces its caste dominance with brutality.

Gopinath and his group hailed from this community and were annoyed by the fact that young Dalits like Sasikumar have empowered themselves with education and are campaigning for rights and asserting their identity on social platforms.

"Are you the son of Cakkiliya Paya
Thangavelu who opens the water of
Vasurampatti village? The one studying
in Chennai?" they thundered. Sasikumar
is brave and boldly replied in the
affirmative. What followed was a string
of verbal abuses.

"You are arrogant enough to write about Periyar and Ambedkar ideologies on social media? Studying law has given you guts, is it?" they asked Sasikumar. An unperturbed Sasikumar stood his ground, the courage of his convictions kept his held high and he demanded he be spoken to respectfully.

An enraged Gopi and his group of dominant castes started abusing Sasikumar further. "We have no respect for people of your caste who eat the left-overs we give them," they said. One of them demanded, "Who are you to criticise dominant caste people like us?"

The verbal abuse soon turned into a physical assault and the group began beating Sasikumar harshly with slippers. A fighting Sasikumar told them he will complain to the police. To that the group retaliated with threats to kills his entire family publicly.

Wounded severely by the assault,
Sasikumar had to be rushed to the
Namakkal government hospital and had
to undergo treatment for two days before
he was discharged.

Despite the brazen crime and the presence of witnesses, police action in the case has been lethargic. Efforts taken to prosecute the accused are simply not adequate.

While a case was filed at the local police station under Sections 294 (b), 341, 323, 355, 506 (2) of the IPC and under Section 3 (1) (s), 3 (2) (va) of the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act 2015, the accused have not yet been arrested.

Instead, the victim has been receiving threats to withdraw his complaint and settle the matter internally within the village. Some relevant SC/ST PoA act sections have also been omitted from the FIR.

Since Sasikumar was a known activist with social media contacts, Evidence, which is part of the DHRD network, was able to notice the case and help the victim.

Human rights research team and local DHRD activists undertook fact finding exercises and collected all necessary documentation.

A formal complaint was prepared and sent to 9 different departments and Human Rights Commission. The Deputy superintendent of police was contacted and requested to add sections related to continuous intimidation of the victim.

Given the fact that victim is an activist himself, it is essential for the law enforcement mechanism to make an example of this case and ensure speedy trial and punishment of the accused.

The family of the victim must be counselled and witnesses in the case protected. There is also a need for a dialogue between the Dalits and caste Hindu groups in the area to ensure that there is social amity and protection for Dalits.

If it was a law student at Namakkal, it was a television journalist in Villupuram, a Dalit, who was attacked.

43-year-old Adhi Suresh is a strong Dalit rights defender in Ulundurpet area of north Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district. He has taken to journalism and television to ensure that Dalit issues are highlighted.

His wife, Jaya, is a police constable and the couple have helped several Dalit families.

So, when a group from the dominant caste was defacing a poster of Dr. Ambedkar with cow dung, on the 23rd of April 2020 at around 8:00 PM, Suresh was enraged. He had just dropped Jaya at her police station when he noticed the act.

Though he was alone he decided to question it and began filming it on his cell phone. It is a crime under the law to disrespect posters, images or statues of revered Indian leaders and an act of this nature had to be questioned.

Suresh did not challenge the

mob of around 10 people by confronting them. He merely recorded their act and was going to question it through democratic and constitutional process.

However, the mob noticed he was filming their despicable behaviour and began to attack him. Their intent was not just to break his camera and destroy evidence, instead it was to eliminate Suresh and send a message that a Dalit could not challenge their actions.

They attacked him with knives and wooden logs and beat him up repeatedly. The attack left him nursing grievous wounds for almost 20 days at the Government hospital.

Fortunately, Suresh survived and will continue to fight for his rights. He has identified those who assaulted him and the accused were arrested. The case was filed at the Ulundurpet Police Station, Crime no 512/2020, under Sections 294 (b), 324, 427, 307 of the IPC and under Section 3 (1) (r), 3 (1) (s), 3 (2) (va) of the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Violence Prevention of Atrocities Act 2015.

Cases like these highlight the urgent need to create mechanisms to protect the defenders who are bravely supporting the victims in fighting for their rights against all odds.

Image Credit: Rahee Punyashloka.

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and
Public Bolti social media campaign called
#LockDownCasteAtrocities.



### A Casteist Sarpanch Assaults a Dalit Mother



village Sarpanch (President of the local Village administration) is elected by the people to ensure that the village is administered well and social justice is delivered to the people. However, often, the Sarpanch in a village is a reiteration of caste identities and a feudal mindset.

They indulge in enormous corruption and corner resources for their caste groups and families. Sarpanch Amitbhai Sagarbhai Koli Patel of the Kerala village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district is a scathing example of what a Sarpanch should NOT be.

He is notorious for his muscle power and belongs to the aggressive OBC Koli caste. Amitbhai rules his village with an iron grip and often the Dalits in the village are at the receiving end of his tactics.

Caste divisions are pronounced in Kerala village and this is despite its proximity to the bustling Ahmedabad city – the nerve center of Gujarat – and the availability of schooling, medical care and basic facilities.

A simple and straightforward 50-year-old Ramilaben Maheriya and her husband Chandrakantbhai Maheriya raised their three children, two sons and a daughter, at Kerala village.

The family belongs to the Scheduled Caste Rohit community and the village is in a highly Industrial area next to the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation's Kerala complex on the bustling Bavla-Bhagodara highway.

The main source of livelihood for the families in this area are factory jobs at the companies in the Industrial complex and none have agricultural land or access to any other source of livelihood. The wages range from Rs.200 to 250 for an 8 to 12-hour labour day and there is little social or job security.

The lure of quick money makes several children drop out of school after 8th or 9th standard to take up jobs as daily wagers. But Ramilaben and Chandrakantbhai worked hard and ensured that their 3 kids excelled in education and completed graduation.

Ramila herself had studied till 7th Standard and was keen to see her children well qualified.

The oldest amongst the three is 32-yearold Pankajbhai Maheriya and he completed his Bachelors in Arts and Education, but preferred to work as a contractor in his village and is even a member of the village panchayat. 30-year-old Smitaben is the second child and she is an engineer like her younger brother Surajbhai

With education the Dalit family lived a life of dignity. They were polite and civil with their neighbors and the children, like the parents, enjoyed their life in Kerala village.

Unlike this ideal Dalit family, the 'upper' caste Kolis indulge in illegal country liquor business and often use henchmen and violence to settle their disputes. They have both money and muscle power and often have nefarious connections in the local police force.

Domestic abuse and harassment of women is rampant in the area, but Ramilaben and her children stayed clear of these elements. However, their peace got shattered on the 12th of June 2020.

Pankajbhai, Ramilaben's oldest son, had been pursuing the Sarpanch for pending payments relating to some work that he did for the Panchayat. Despite repeated requests the Sarpanch refused to release payments and to settle the matter Pankajbhai asked his mother Ramilaben and younger brother Suraj to make a visit to the Panchayat office.

When Ramilaben went to the office and requested the Sarpanch to release the payment, Amitbhai, the caste heady Sarpanch, began abusing her. Taken aback, the gentle and polite Ramilaben and her young engineer son Surajbhai requested the Sarpanch to stop shouting and speak to them politely.

But Amitbhai only turned more abusive and started physically assaulting Ramilaben. A desperate Surajbhai tried to protect his mother but he realised the situation was getting worse. People in the area gathered around and tried to stop the Sarpanch.

But the Sarpanch along with his brothers continued his brazen assault. He even pulled out his revolver and threatened to kill Ramilaben. "How dare you demand money from me?" he threatened.

One of the villagers called Pankajbhai and informed him about the turn of events.

A perplexed Pankajbhai reached the pan-

chayat only to find that his mother had been humiliated. His blood boiled with rage as he was unable to protect his mother from such a mortifying experience.

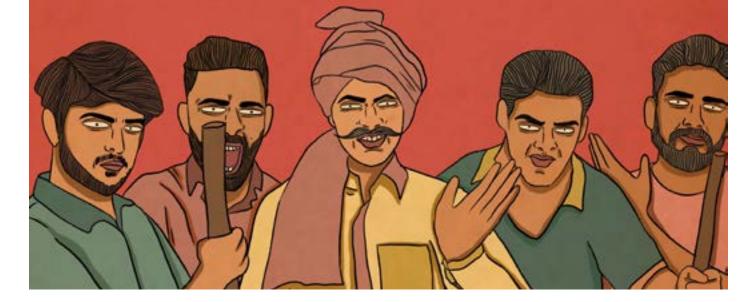
However, there was little that could be done and the mother did not want her educated sons to get into a physical fight with 'upper' Caste hooligans. Ramilaben and her sons left the panchayat office and went to the local police station to file a complaint.

An innocent Dalit woman was physically assaulted by a local Sarpanch in full public view at the Panchayat office. The case is straightforward, but the Sarpanch had deep connection with the police due to his illegal activities.

The police registered a complaint, but delayed the investigation to help the accused. They did not arrest the accused Sarpanch immediately and cited the Covid-19 lockdown as an excuse. This gave the accused time to move a case in the High Court falsifying evidence.

The High Court had stayed the police from arresting any of the accused and though seven of them were named in the complaint - Amitbhai Sagarbhai Koli Patel, Rajubhai Chamanbhai Koli Patel, Jaswantbhai Merabhai Koli Patel, Rajubhai Mohanbhai Koli Patel, Rajubhai Mohanbhai Koli Patel, Ankit Dharmeshbhai Koli Patel, Kiran Rajeshbhai Koli Patel and Sanjaybhai Koli Patel – none went behind bars.

To challenge this miscarriage of justice, Ramilaben and her family now have the



assistance of a lawyer at the High Court. This was possible because the case was brought to the attention of DHRD as the Kerala village is near the DHRD affiliate organisation office in Ahmedabad.

The victim had also posted incident details on social media that went viral and caught the attention of Human rights and Dalit Rights defenders and local activists at Bavla got in touch with Pankajbhai.

Given the gravity of the matter and clout of the accused, DHRD activists have been closely following the matter.

Despite such focus on the case, the counsel for the accused misled the court and stated that they were in talks with the plaintiff for a settlement and had the case postponed to a later date. The victims had to file a counter affidavit before the court that such claims of negotiations are a blatant lie.

These are tactics used by the accused to delay an order from the High court and avert being arrested. Unfortunately, they have worked in favour of the accused.

DHRD activists have also stepped up pressure on the case and are in constant

touch with Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) national and state teams.

There is a desperate need for haste in legal proceedings in this deliberate case and the first aim is to vacate the stay on arrest of the accused. There are several witnesses to the assault and the firearm in possession of the accused is illegal and without any permit.

All efforts need to be focussed on the arrest of the accused and take the campaign for justice for Ramilaben and her family forward. The case has great significance as it shows even an educated Dalit family cannot get justice, a setback like this has the potential to make the weaker sections lose faith in the legal process completely.

Image Credit: Illustrations by Priyanka Paul

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.

# Punished for Defending her Children

A mother of two is assaulted in full public glare by her dominant caste landlord and her father's suspicious death is passed off as suicide



Il that 34-year-old Sadhana Kale asserted was that her children can play on the government-owned road outside the house of her former, upper caste landlord and what she received was a violent retaliation.

Sadhana was a fighter all her life. Her role model was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution and iconic leader for the country.

Having recovered from a divorce, she worked at a beauty parlour and single-handedly ensured that her two daughters 12 and 14 years of age – had access to good education and a dignified life.

Like thousands of others in Maharashtra, the Kale family were Dalits who converted to Buddhism many years ago and Sadhana's father, Sonwane, was a pillar of support for Sadhana and the girls. Her mother and sister also helped her out.

They belonged to the Koyali area in Khed Taluk of Pune district and were rehabilitated and given permanent houses by the government after severe floods a few years ago.

However, Sadhana was fiercely independent and did not want to be dependent on her parents. She moved in with her daughters to a house she rented from Mukta Gilbile in the Shikrapur village.

The Gilbile's belong to the dominant Maratha caste in the area and had a building where they rented out rooms to several families. In fact, in Koyali, the caste divisions are obvious. While Dalits and Maratha castes were given houses by the government, Maratha caste houses have borewells that the Dalit houses cannot afford to dig. This results in water scarcity for the Dalits.

These divisions were more pronounced in a house owned by Mukta Gilbile.

The landlord was known to abuse her tenants. Sadhana tolerated Mukta's abuses and stayed on partly because she did not want to be dependent on her parents and partly because all tenants tolerated the dominant caste landlord's behaviour.

However, the landlord's abuse worsened with the nationwide lockdown. When the whole country could not move around, Mukta demanded that Sadhana's family and other tenants in the building vacate the premises.

The tenants suffered through the process of finding a place to stay and slowly began vacating; Sadhana had no choice but to prepare for moving in with her parents. As the dominant caste landlord threw her tenants to the road during a nationwide lockdown, oblivious to caste convolutions, Sadhana's daughters were playing on the road.

Innocent children riding a bicycle on a public road turned into a flashpoint for a caste atrocity.

Sadhana's daughters were abused by Mukta Gilbile and told not to ride a bicycle before her house. The perplexed children went to their mother for help and Sadhana decided to confront the Gilbile family. They may own the house, but not the road, and Sadhana decided to stand up for her family. When she demanded answers, the Gilbile family started verbally abusing her and began throwing casteist slurs.

Sadhana was a proud Dalit and stood up for her rights. That's when the verbal abuse turned physical and the entire Gilbile family began kicking and beating the Dalit woman. Mukta even bit Sadhana's ear.

All this happened in broad daylight, in front of several witnesses, but no one came forward to help Sadhana. Many witnesses were from the Maratha caste and did not want to help. Others were simply too afraid to anger the dominant castes and support the victim.

What followed was a lesson in how the authorities help perpetuate caste violence. Mukta filed a case against Sadhana and the entire family and began harassing her with the help of the police. When the victim tried filing a complaint the police refused to take her case.

A month later, on the 14th of August, Sadhana's father Sonwane, the only male member of the family, went missing and on the 15th of August, as India celebrated its 73rd Independence Day, the family got to know that Sonwane had died.

Sadhana's family filed a complaint naming Mukta and her family as accused,

but the police filed a case of suicide and not murder. It goes to show that Dalits in this area have little political or administrative power and most of that is cornered by the dominant castes.

In fact, many of the witnesses tried to convince Sadhana that she should endure the atrocity and move on without fighting as there was no way she could win.

However, Sadhana has decided to stand her ground and ensure that she gets justice. Despite difficulties in traveling to the police station due to the lockdown, Sadhana went there repeatedly to demand justice. But they still wouldn't help her.

Finally, through Kapil Shivsharan who is associated with Centre for Development and Social Justice Studies and working with Manuski on a DHRD fellowship, the victim was identified and the matter systematically pursued with the police.

Pressure from the activists led to a police complaint being filed under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities act and the accused were arrested. Manuski also provided legal guidance to the victim with the help of advocates Ambdas Bansode and Pratibha Shakya. Initially, a bail application by the accused was opposed in court but the courts granted them bail anyways.

Sadhana was also given support to apply for monetary compensation as prescribed under the Prevention of Atrocities act. But the process to justice is both arduous and requires financial resources.



The victim may need to move the High Court to oppose bail for the accused and ensure that the cases – the murder of her father and the assault on her, are pursued till a logical end. Victims in such cases are also often given too much unnecessary information by uninformed people resulting in confusion about pursuing the right legal path,

For instance, when Sonawanes's body was found, DHRD members insisted that the victim should ensure the FIR was filed, including a charge of murder under section 302 of IPC.

But relatives and others influenced the family's decision and Sonawane's last rites were conducted without registration of FIR under 302 of the IPC and sections of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

While these sections were added later, the delay was the reason the accused were granted anticipatory bail. Limited resources of DHRD are often put to test as devoting too much attention on one case could mean taking focus away from another.

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Previous page: Anton Croos on Wikimedia Above: Nidhin Shobhna

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t was love for her 17-year-old son, Raghu, that made 40-year-old Parvati (name changed) brave the nearly 100-kilometre journey from the nondescript Batoda village in Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan to the town of Dausa

Her husband is an alcoholic and Parvati had to work several jobs to raise her son. Unfortunately, the teenager also fell into alcoholism. Raghu was arrested after a drunken brawl in their village and was lodged at the Dausa jail. Parvati did not give up, instead, she took it upon herself to protect her son and wanted to make sure that he felt loved and accepted despite his crime.

She hoped that this would help him give up drinking and rebuild his life. She would make frequent visits to Dausa and counsel him and give him home cooked food. But the sudden, unplanned nationwide lockdown meant that there was no way she could meet her son.

The frustrated mother decided to dare the lockdown and go to Dausa on the 21st of April 2020. With no public transport, she walked all the way to the jail and reached late at night, after a gruelling 15-hour trek. The authorities were taken aback by the mother's commitment to her son and allowed her to meet Raghu the next morning.

After the meeting they advised her not to wander around and go back to her village and return to Dausa only after the lockdown was lifted. She had little money to hire transportation and no food or

shelter to stay on in Dausa, but content with having seen and fed her son she began the long and arduous trek back home.

Scorched and tired she finally reached Bathoda town at around 11PM on the 22nd. Dehydrated, confused and on the verge of collapse when villagers found her. They immediately got her food and water and informed the local police.

Following the rules for anyone who had arrived after travel, the villagers decided to quarantine Parvati for the night at a government school and have her tested the next morning. It was not clear to them where she had gone and the people she met.

To avoid any risk of Parvati being COVID-19 positive and spreading the virus they asked her to stay the night at the Government school which had turned into the quarantine centre.

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of another ordeal for Parvati who had just survived the journey from Dausa. She was alone at the school and though the police and villagers were worried about her safety they did not leave anyone with her for security.

Exhausted from the long trek back home and finally having decent shelter, Parvati went to sleep. She was in deep slumber when the three men - Rishikesh Meena, Lakhan Ram and Kamal Kharwal - came into the centre overpowered the woman and began raping her one after the other.

They had gagged her and tied her legs and were aware that there was no one to protect the lone Dalit woman or take up her case after. She was an easy prey.

Parvati had walked all the way, braving the sun and a potentially killer journey, just to become another Dalit woman brutally abused by the sexual animosity of 'upper' caste Hindu men. That the incident took place at the local quarantine facility only makes it more disturbing.

The next morning, an inconsolable Parvati narrated her ordeal to the police and was told by the police to wait in her house.

Medical tests reveal that she was both Covid positive and raped.

On filing of the complaint, the local police station registered an FIR and once the woman identified the three accused, they were arrested. One reason for the swift action was the fact the rape had taken place inside the quarantine facility and it was the local police's responsibility to ensure that Parvati was safe.

A lady constable or volunteer ought to have been posted there. If there were none, some kind of security ought to have been provided by the police. Unfortunately, there was no safety for the woman and it was clear that Dalit and Human rights defenders would demand answers.

To avoid any further embarrassment the police took prompt action against the accused. The head constable at Batoda police station, Lal Chand, was suspended for dereliction of duty. The case invoked relevant sections of the IPC and the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities act. While justice and nabbing of the accused was quick in this case, the trauma that Parvati endured has scarred her for life.

A similar case in an affluent, urban setting would have ignited a nation-wide outrage. Unfortunately, in the remote rural corners of India, poor women, Dalit and otherwise, are raped each day and little information reaches the rest of the country.

Caste divisions are also pronounced in villages like Batoda where the 700 odd Dalit families live separately from the 'upper' castes and are often abused. That is why the arrest of the accused in the Sawai Mahopur case is just the beginning of the process and the road to convictions is fraught with risk.

Crime records suggest that there has been a 50 percent increase in number of rape cases in India over the last decade and an almost 50 percent increase in crimes against Dalits.

This underlines the fact that women in general remain vulnerable and Dalit women are even more so.

Conviction rates in rape cases are also disturbing at 51% in Rajasthan.

The conviction rate, according to NCRB, is calculated by dividing the number of convictions in any given year by cases in which trials were completed in that year.

On an average, 10 daily cases of rape of Dalit women were reported last year in the country with Rajasthan reporting the highest number at 554 cases. Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh followed with 537 and 510 rape cases respectively. The rate of such crimes (cases per lakh Dalit population) was 4.5 for both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh; Kerala with the rate of 4.6 cases per lakh population was first in the country.

DHRD network activists have been in close touch with the victim and following the case consistently. The police also released a compensation of Rs. 50,000 to the victim and have been under pressure to take the matter up seriously. The District collector had also instructed them to ensure the case has no loopholes and all this could help Parvati get justice, someday.

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Sexual Assaults

Total 13,449 sexual assault related

crimes on Dalit Women

reported in 2019

Rajasthan leads
with 554 cases
of Rape

Madhya

**Pradesh stands** 

third with 510

cases of Rape

Uttar Pradesh
stands second
with 537 cases
of Rape

3,486 - cases of

**Rape (7.59% of the** 

total registered PoA

cases in 2019)

Source: National Crime Records Bureau



### Choking in a Chamber of Horrors

Four young boys in Tamil Nadu join a long list of Dalits who have died during manual scavenging



In the 1950s, Gobichettypalayam

Municipality in Western Tamil Nadu was

one of the first local bodies to ban the
inhuman and repulsive practice of
manual scavenging.

Unfortunately, six decades later the practice remains prevalent around the country and a central legislation banning it, combined with strong activism, has not been able to eradicate it. Ironically, Tamil Nadu, which has won laurels for good governance, also tops in the list of deaths due to manual scavenging.

During the nationwide lockdown the state witnessed the horrific deaths of four young Dalit boys - Pandi (28 years), Isakkiraj (17 years), Dinesh (19 years) and Balakrishnan (24 years) - due to asphyxiation inside a septic tank in the southern Thoothukudi district of the state.

The incident is a painful reminder that even as the country was under lockdown, young and old Dalits continued to risk their lives and entered septic tanks and sewers to clean the filth and faeces generated by the rest of the society, each and every day.

They do so without even the most basic of protection. Sympathy and remorse are just lip service and there are an estimated 700,000 people who endure the reality of manual scavenging in the country.

The deaths of the four young boys at Keela Chekkarakudi village is a reminder of this painful reality. Desperate for some income Pandi, Ishaqraj, Dinesh and Balakrishnan agreed to clean a septic tank at a house owned by 65-year-old Somasundaram at the Keela Chekkarakudi village in Thoothukudi district of Southern Tamil Nadu on the 2nd of July 2020.

All four belonged to Veervanallur in the neighbouring Tirunelveli district. While Pandi, Isakiraja and Balakrishnan worked as manual scavengers and had cleaned several such tanks before, Dinesh was a daily wager and accompanied the group as he was desperate for income.

Thousands of poor Dalit men and women put their lives at risk for the pittance they earn for a gruelling and repulsive work and do so despite the danger of death due to asphyxiation.

Little did Pandi, Ishaqraj, Dinesh and Balakrishnan know that their life was about to be snuffed out by the poisonous gasses in the septic tank on that day. They began cleaning the tank and after two rounds of cleaning one of them fainted inside the tank.

The other three tried to rescue him and in the process inhaled the poisonous fumes and collapsed. By the time the four were pulled out of the tank, three of them had died and one would only survive a little longer and eventually died in the hospital.

The inhuman process of manual scavenging involves jumping into tanks and sewers holding the breath to come in

direct physical contact with filth and faecal matter piled up inside the tanks. The filth emanates general poisonous gases and the workers hold their breath up to two- or three-minutes cleaning the filth without inhaling the gases.

A slight error and inhalation could prove deadly and this is precisely why the law bans the practice. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 or M.S. Act 2013 was legislation passed to ensure that the practice is eradicated.

However, it continues unabated. The incident at Keela Chekkarakudi village was neither the first nor the last. On the 16th of August 45-year-old Murugesan and 22-year-old Sanjay died due to asphyxiation while cleaning an unused water tank in Muniyampalayam village in Namakkal district of the state.

Incidents of asphyxiation and deaths due to it seem to be increasing in cases of cleaning of septic tanks in restaurants, factories, offices, and residences in the state. An estimated 25-30 septic tank deaths are reported every year in the state.

It is a major issue in the heart of the bustling Indian cities. In 2019, a 25-year-old man died in Chennai's famous Express Avenue mall. While Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh record some of the highest incidents of manual scavenging, Tamil Nadu has topped the list and has recorded over 88 septic tank deaths in the last three years.

Action against the owners is an urgent requirement. The fact that those who own these tanks and sewers employ manual scavengers with little regard for the law is because rarely is action taken against them. In many cases the errant include government and municipal officials and those engaged in civic bodies.

In the case of the deaths at Keela Chekkarakudi the police have arrested 65-year-old, A. Somasundaram the owner of the tank. They have charged him under Section 163/2020 Sections 288, 304 of the IPC, under section 8, 9 of the prevention of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation act 2013; and under Section 3 (1) (j) of the Scheduled Castes List Tribal Violence Prevention Amendment Act 2015.

The Government of Tamil Nadu announced a compensation of Rs. 10 lakhs to the families of the deceased. Government officials have also been listed as accused in the case that has been filed. However, as has been the case in most such cases, once the public attention on the case fades, most of those accused go free and the practice perpetuates.

Statistics are telling: Wikipedia page on manual scavenging records that according to the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, 180,657 households within India are engaged in manual scavenging for a livelihood. In 2011, the national census recorded 794,000 cases of manual scavenging across the country and the state of Maharashtra had 63,713 household



dependent on the inhuman practice for a livelihood. Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura and Karnataka were the others, in this infamous top 5.

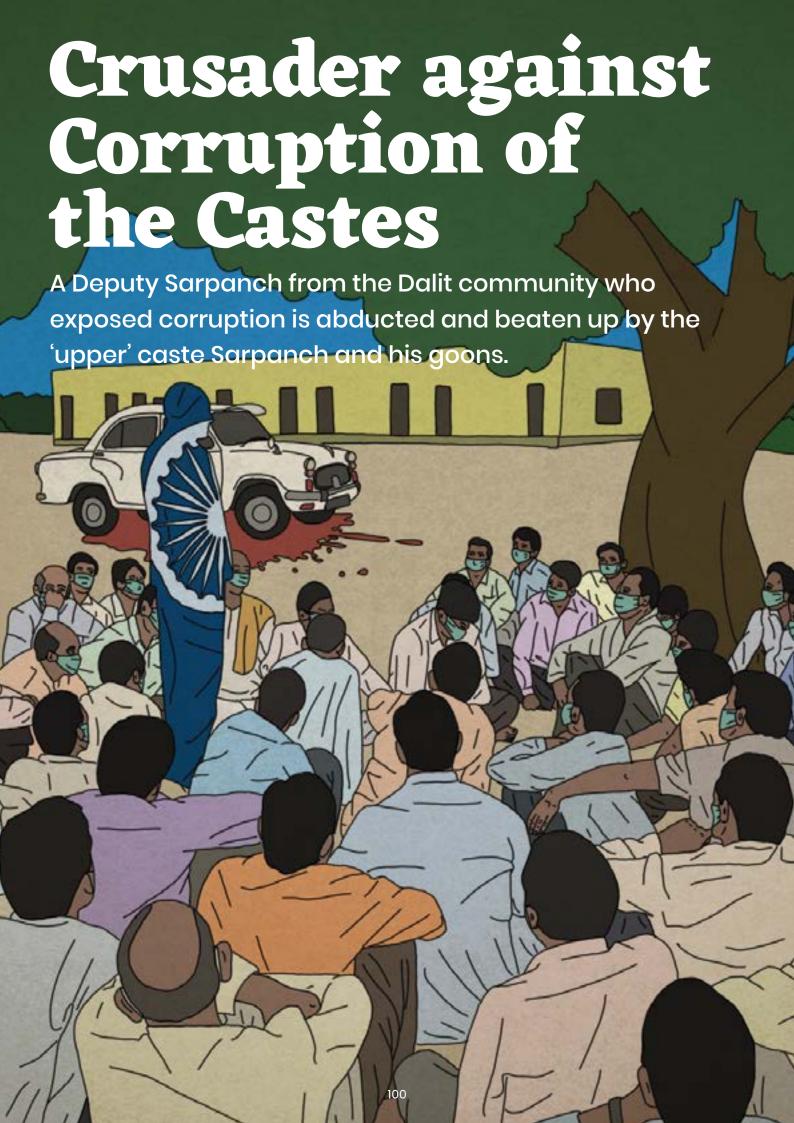
One of the key hurdles in the quest for a lasting solution is poor rehabilitation of those who depend on this practice for a livelihood. As mentioned earlier, it is only the socially and economically most downtrodden even amongst Dalits who endure manual scavenging. Therefore, targeted rehabilitation and effective alternate source of livelihood is imperative to protect them.

It is abundantly clear that a strong legislation and awareness campaign created by activism alone cannot eradicate the practice. These need to be backed by a social re-engineering initiative that can ensure there is neither demand nor supply for such a repulsive practice.

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Image Credit: Vilas Ghogre. This artwork was created for a social media campaign for this report called #LockDownCasteAtrocities done by DHRDNet X Public Bolti



aking on corruption in Indian politics is a dangerous task. Death threats and physical assaults are part of the life of anti-corruption crusaders. Some live to tell the tale and others are killed in their fight for the people.

The fight only becomes enormously more difficult if the one exposing corruption is a Dalit and the corrupt belongs to a dominant caste. It gets worse if the fight is set in the feudal, rural confines of the country.

Despite all this, 47-year-old Dharmaraj Dandge was known amongst his people as the upright, honest lawyer who would fight for the rights of people and against corruption in his Ramapur village in the remote rural Amravati district of Maharashtra.

Dharmaraj's integrity is impeccable and he never bowed down to caste compulsions, this is why the people of his village elected him unopposed as the Deputy Sarpanch for the village. They knew that he would ensure a good administration and development for all.

Ramapur is desperate for development, there is only one primary school in the village and that ends with class 4.

Students who wish to pursue studies need to travel to other villages and often girl children drop out. The dominant Maratha castes corner most of the resources and caste divisions are palpable.

Dalits stay in semi-constructed houses, Marathas live in palatial homes and dominate administrative positions and politics of the area.

But having studied law to serve the people, Dharmaraj dedicated his life to change the social realities of his village. It is his social work for nearly three decades that made the villagers choose him to be deputy Sarpanch and emerge as an honest counter power to the Maratha caste Sarpanch Ingle.

The village population is dominated by the Maratha castes so once they elected a Sarpanch, the rest of the village, including the Dalits, unanimously decided that Dharmaraj should be the deputy Sarpanch. They relied on Dharmaraj's strong shoulders to bear the burden of administering equality and ensuring that Ingle did not abuse resources.

Since the start of his tenure Dharmaraj had brought about many changes and being a lawyer, he did not allow the Sarpanch to siphon off village funds for his personal work. All this had frustrated Ingle who took the position only to reap financial rewards.

Dharmaraj and others in the Panchayat were also frustrated with Ingle as he stone walled all development works and refused to listen to the advice of the deputy Sarpanch and others. Dharmaraj also found several irregularities in the village finances and decided it was time to take on the Sarpanch publicly.

6 members of the panchayat led by Dharmaraj proposed a vote of no



confidence against Ingle and the vote was due on the 13th of May 2020. Though the lockdown was in place, rural politics and administration of the village had to go on.

On the eve of the vote, Ingle realised that the honest Deputy Sarpanch was all set for a victory and decided to turn to brazen physical intimidation in a bid to staying in power. He went to Dharmaraj's house on the 12th of May and told the lawyer that he wanted to have a conversation.

Dharmaraj was not aware that the Sarpanch would dare to physically assault his deputy and thought Ingle was genuine about wanting to discuss some of the issues. Trustingly, Dharmaraj boarded Ingle's car.

However, when they reached the nearby Chikhaldar post in the Achalpur area Ingle was joined by his henchman Pritesh Avghad and gang of Maratha castes. They started physically assaulting Dharmaraj and threatened him with death if he did not withdraw the no-confidence motion.

Dharmaraj was strong and tried to fight back and escape but the Maratha Sarpanch and his gang overpowered him and beat him with sticks and punches as they drove the car to another place. They kept driving around and beating the lawyer all night and ensured that he could not attend the no-confidence vote in time on the morning of the 13th.

Once they knew there was no way
Dharmaraj could reach the village in time
for the vote they made him forcibly sign
a stamp paper and write that he did not
attend the panchayat and no-confidence
vote voluntarily.

A bleeding Dharmaraj was in a critical state but the accused did not bother taking him to a hospital. Instead, they dumped the lawyer outside his house and threatened to kill his entire family if he complained.

The no-confidence vote was lost and the Sarpanch held on to his position as Dharmaraj was not present at the meeting. But the brave heart Dharmaraj has not retreated. Though he is the sole bread winner and lives with his wife, two children and an ageing father, family vulnerabilities never stood in the way for the lawyer and his activism.

Like him, his family was shocked that a lawyer and Deputy Sarpanch could face this kind of a brazen assault, but they refused to be cowed down.

Once he recovered from the assault physically, Dharmaraj began the task of seeking justice for himself and all those in the village. He had the full support of the legal fraternity and his family.

In fact, the Amravati district court had shut down for a day in protest against the assault on the lawyer and such support bolstered Dharmaraj's confidence.

Initially, the police were reluctant to file a complaint but given the fact that Dharmaraj is a lawyer and had the support of fellow lawyers and Dalit Rights defenders they were forced to register an FIR invoking stringent sections of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

The prime accused, Ingle, along with his henchmen, were arrested and spent almost a month in jail before being released on bail.

"A corrupt Sarpanch could brazenly attack his honest deputy primarily because of caste. He may not have dared to do this had both been from the same caste and the retribution from the village would have been stronger," feels Dharmaraj.

These are realities that every activist, Human Rights defender from the Dalit community have to face. But, like Dharmaraj, they march on against the castes risking their lives.

In Dharmaraj's case, he is leading the campaign himself and Manuski is only providing support if needed.

Two important issues that need to be addressed immediately are a) the police need to submit their investigation report at the earliest b) the victim needs to be given compensation as per the law.

Image Credits: Siddesh Gautam

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.



A young boy is forced to clean faeces with his bare hands as punishment for accidently defecating at the corner of an 'upper' caste agricultural field Fourteen year-old Harivarasan is tall and strongly built for his age. The cheerful young 10th standard student who is obsessed with watching cricket is, sadly, testimony to the fact that even a bright young boy like him can be heartlessly subjected to ruthless, inhuman, and humiliating punishments by caste Hindus.

This is how they teach Dalits a "lesson" not to challenge the feudal caste hierarchy. The dry and backward Dharmapuri district in Northern Tamil Nadu is known for several caste atrocities. It falls under the influence belt of the Vanniyar caste Hindus. Their powerful political organisations, along with other caste outfits, are notorious for atrocities on Dalits.

It is against this social backdrop that young Harivarasan's Kondarampatti village is located. The Dalit households are segregated and each time a Dalit demands his right, like entry to the local temple, a caste clash follows.

The caste Hindus own most of the agricultural land and the Scheduled Caste Parayar families, like that of Harivarasan's, work as agricultural labourers and perform menial jobs for a livelihood.

Harivarasan's father Krishnamoorthy, mother Pavanammal, sister and grand-parents live in abject poverty in a three-room hut with a thatched roof. There is no toilet in the house and with no public toilet either in the area, most Dalit families, including women, are forced to defecate

in the open. They try to find secluded corners of fields for their daily routine.

On a rainy 15th of July 2020, Harivarasan went to the corner of a field at around 5PM to answer nature's call. However, since it was pouring the boy did not go far away from the agricultural fields and stopped behind a bush in a field owned by 45- year old Rajasekaran.

The landlord belongs to the Lingathu Ayyar caste, an OBC caste which aggressively asserts itself over the Dalits. So, when he spotted young Harivarasan sitting behind the bush with an umbrella to protect him from the rain, he was infuriated. He screamed, "You son of a whore how dare you defecate on my land." Rajasekhar's intimidating voice with casteist slurs filled the boy with fear.

He started apologising incessantly with tears rolling down his cheeks. But caste knows no mercy and Rajasekar started beating Harivarasan with a bamboo stick. The poor child was writhing in pain.

Can a child hold back the basic human function in the absence of a toilet? Does a child know demarcation of land on a dark rainy evening? Even if he did, is it not human to forgive?

Caste knows no forgiveness, even to a child. Rajasekar had to teach the boy a lesson, which would go out to the other Dalits, for daring to defecate on his land. And the physical and verbal abuse which went on unabated did not suffice.

The punishment had to be worse.

Rajasekaran forced a flogged and injured Harivarasan to clean the faeces with his bare hands. The boy carried the faeces in his hands for over 50 metres before he was allowed to discard it. He threatened to kill the boy if he did not obey.

Yes, that is what Harivarasan did.
Imagine the trauma, humiliation, nausea and lifelong scar the boy would carry. Even witnessing such an act will be repulsive for a normal human being, but Rajasekar forced the boy into such an act only to reiterate his caste dominance.

The boy was in tears as he ran back to his father Krishnamoorthy and wailed in humiliation. "Even my friends saw me, how will I show my face in the village ever again," he cried. His parents are heartbroken to see their cheerful boy often silent and brooding and they fear he might become suicidal. There is an urgent need for psychological counselling which the poor family cannot dream to afford.

A neighbour who saw the incident also narrated it to the father but was too scared to take on the caste Hindu landlord. Krishnamoorthy and his relatives mustered the courage to challenge the atrocity and went to the Ponnagaram police station to file a complaint. But the police delayed the process of filing a complaint and when questioned ended up filing a false case against the victim's family.

Filing of such counter cases against a victim's family is a notorious tactic used by caste Hindus in connivance with the police

to ensure that victims do not pursue the case and are threatened into submission.

"Police favour the upper caste men and money rules. How can we expect justice for innocent people like us," asks Krishnamoorthy.

However, Harivarasan's family soon got the support of activists from DHRD to pursue the matter and who prevailed on the police to register a case against Rajasekaran. A case was eventually filed under Section No. 1090/2020, Section 323 of the IPC and under Section 3 (1) (i) of the Scheduled Castes / Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act. The accused Rajasekar has been arrested and remanded to judicial custody.

DHRD network's advocate Mathayan, member of the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front, has spearheaded this case and given the family all necessary legal support. A fact-finding team had also accompanied the victim's family to the police station.

There is a need for the police to include other, more stringent, sections of the SC/ST PoA Act and ensure a chargesheet is filed at the earliest. Compensation must be paid for the victim and the false case filed against the victim's family must be withdrawn immediately.

A systematic mechanism for such families to access activists and legal counsel must also be set up along with psychological counselling for victims like Harivarasan.

In the last 5 years, there have been six similar recorded cases, including cases where Dalits were even forced to eat faeces as punishment. As disgusting and nauseating as it sounds, it is a reality that several Dalit victims have endured.

They have suffered the insufferable stigma for the rest of their lives.

These are only the few recorded cases; in many such cases the matter goes without a complaint or demand for justice.

Often, even those few victims in cases like this who dare to challenge the atrocity are threatened with counter cases and succumb to social and police pressure. There is a grave need for law enforcement authorities to crack down on such extreme cases and shocking inhuman practices.

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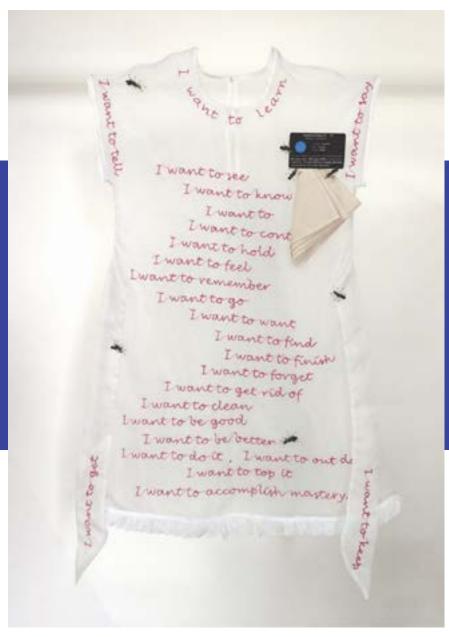
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Image Credit: Illustrations by Ajinkya Dekhane
This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and
Public Bolti social media campaign called
#LockDownCasteAtrocities.



## Innocence Robbed in Lockdown

A child is raped and murdered by her neighbour who dumped the body in garbage



even year-year-old Devi (name changed) was happily playing outside her house as her family was busy attending to relatives in their small house at Ambal Melakudiyurpu settlement near the Audaiyarko village in Tamil Nadu's Pudukottai district.

Devi's family had several domestic troubles, but despite these she was a happy child and would play out in the open often. With school being shut down due to the lockdown, the only entertainment for the standard II girl was playing on her own outside her hut or with her 5-year-old sister Naveetha.

Her father, 58-year-old Naguran was an alcoholic and had two failed marriages. Devi and Naveetha were from Naguran's third marriage to Selvi, who was mentally challenged. The family of four lives in a small hut with no electricity, sanitation or other basic facilities.

Dalit hutments in this area are secluded away from the main village and most Dalit families live in poverty. Alcoholism, domestic abuse is common and there is little social support or help that children get to rise above these difficulties.

It was around 4 PM on the 30th of June 2020 when Naguran and his wife noticed that Devi was not playing outside the house. They first thought she might have just strayed in the neighbourhood, so they waited for her to return home.

Hours went by and still Devi did not return home and that is when the family realised something had gone wrong. The family began searching the neighbourhood. They had no clue how she disappeared, but all this while their only thought was she was missing and would be found soon. As night descended, the parents along with the entire family began a frantic night long search for Devi.

Having searched the entire area, the family decided to complain to the police and seek help in their search efforts. They filed a complaint at around 8:00 AM at the local police station and after a few hours of search led to a horrific discovery.

Devi's body was found in a swamp in the neighbourhood. It was left to rot there with ants and insects beginning to eat it away. A little child who was playing happily was overnight a corpse beginning to decompose in a swamp.

What could have happened? The needle of suspicion fell on Raja, a caste Hindu flower worker in the area who knew Devi's father was an alcoholic and there were domestic issues in the family. He saw the little girl as an easy target.

Investigations revealed that Raja had lured the playing child to a nearby forest, raped her, and then murdered her.

He first thought that Devi's father is an alcoholic and mother was mentally ill, the little child would be terrified to complain about the sexual assault. But later he panicked and murdered her, to leave no evidence behind. He left the body to rot in the swamp to ensure no one would find it.

A case was booked under Crime No. 119/2020 Sections 364, 302 201, 376 of the IPC, under Section 5 (m), 5 (j) (iv), 6 (i) of the POCSO Act and under Section 3 (2) (va) of the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Violence Prevention Act 2015 and Raja was arrested and remanded to custody.

Evidence, which is part of the DHRD network, had spearheaded the case after activists spotted the incident on social media. Legal help was given to the family of the victim and activists are pursuing the matter with the authorities.

There is a need to ensure that there is a long-term relationship established with communities in areas like Ambal Melakudiyurpu and work on protecting women from abuse and alcoholism. In several such cases the involvement of caste based political parties is a major impediment to the process of justice and there needs to be systemic measures to prevent such involvement.

Seeking justice for rape of Dalits has been challenging across the country. The Hathras case in Uttar Pradesh has hit the national headlines, but it is just one in hundreds of rapes of Dalit women that are reported around the country. Dalit children and women are extremely vulnerable as they are abused brazenly by caste Hindus in urban and rural areas. According to reports in Tamil Nadu alone on an average 7-10 girl children are sexually abused every day. In fact, 65 percent of sexual assault victims are helpless children.

There have been 12 reported rape incidents of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu alone even during the Corona lockdown period. The number of unreported cases is most likely enormous. The ground reality is, fear of losing their life and the enormous social stigma most often overpowers the victim from even daring to report such brutal inhuman violence.

According to the UN Secretary General the number of domestic violence incidents, worldwide, may have tripled during the pandemic. In India and Tamil Nadu this would certainly translate into more cases of sexual assault on Dalit women and children. Unfortunately, despite several cases hitting the headlines the conviction rate for rapes in India is only 3 percent and it is even lower in the case of Dalit women and children.

It is also an irony that 85 per cent of those accused in incidents of sexual assaults, rapes and murders of women are close relatives and that is testimony that not just society but even family is not safe for a woman and it's definitely more unsafe and crueller to a Dalit woman.

Returning to the tragic case of 7-yearold Devi, her younger sister 5-year-old Naveetha needs to be protected from both domestic and caste abuses. That is perhaps the only real justice for Devi.

### Reference:

urorenews.onepixelz.com/7-year-old-girl-raped-and-beaten-to-death-near-aranthangi

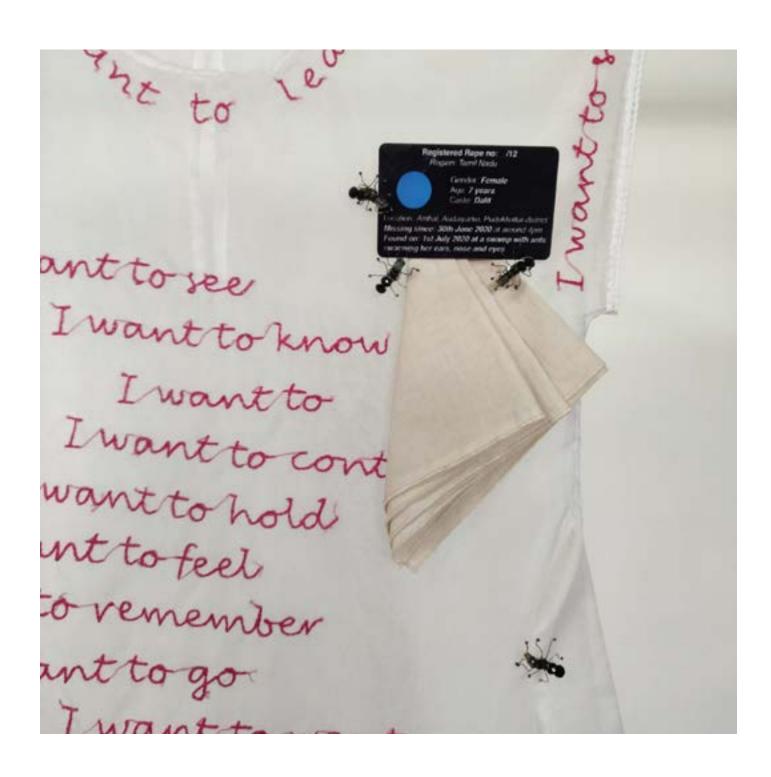


Image Credit: Saviya Lopes

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.

# Bones Broken for Challenging Farm Destruction

A Dalit farmer is left with broken bones after he challenged a powerful Koli caste group for destroying his freshly sown crop

orty year-old Alubhai Bhikhabhai
Sarvaiya's calm and loving
personality does not reveal the grit
and determination he has in standing up
to social injustice and caste hierarchy.
He did not receive formal education, but
has enormous knowledge of his rights,
the law and is ready to fight for Dalit and
Human rights issues.

At the Kantala village in Amreli district of Gujarat's Saurashtra region, Alubhai lives in a joint family with his six brothers and their wives and children. 14 of them share a 5-room house and depend on what they reap from the hard toil of agricultural labour on a piece of land the family owns.

The brothers have stood up for their rights and oppose the domination of the powerful Koli caste in the village. The Kolis are an aggressive OBC caste in Gujarat and have an enormous say in the politics of coastal areas in the Saurashtra region.

Kantala's population of around 4,000 has a sizeable Koli caste presence and only around 15 Dalit families like the Sarvaiyas. While most Dalits work as labourers the Sarvaiyas own their land and that gives them a life of dignity.

Grabbing the land of Dalits is not new to the numerically powerful Koli families in the village and there have been several past instances of Dalits losing their land. The Upper Castes do not touch the Dalits and the social divisions are strong and rigid even today.

For the last three years – since 2017–
Gamabhai Indabhai Koli has made several attempts to intimidate the Sarvaiya brothers to give up portions of their land.
But the six brothers have rallied together and defended it with their sweat and blood. There have been several occasions when they have been physically assaulted, but they did not give up and were pursuing the issue legally.

On the 10th of April 2020, as Gujarat and the nation were under the Covid-19 lockdown, Alubhai noticed some cattle were grazing on his freshly sown field. The perplexed farmer rushed to save his crop from the cattle and realised that the Koli family had purposely allowed the cattle to graze on his farm.

He was furious. The crop was his only source of livelihood and if it was destroyed, he, his brothers and their families would have to starve in the coming months.

He saw Gamabhai Koli along with a few other Koli family members and decided to ask them why they let the cattle graze on his field.

But Gamabhai Koli along with his relatives Rajabhai Gabhabhai Koli, Kanabhai Amrabhai Koli, Rambhai Amrabhai Koli and Bimabhai Khodabhai Koli began abusing a desperate Alubhai. They threw a slew of casteist slurs and abuses at him.

Soon the verbal abuses turned into a brutal physical assault. They beat Alubhai with sticks and the violent attack fractured the defenceless man's arm and leg.

After a merciless assault, the Kolis abandoned Alubhai on the field and left the area with their cattle.

Alubhai was devastated, physically and emotionally. His crop was ravaged by the cattle and his body was broken by the 'upper' castes. His family heard the commotion and rushed to protect him,

but by the time they reached the Kolis had left.

Alubhai struggled his way back to his home, bleeding profusely and in excruciating pain.

His mind was
engulfed in fear,
anger, hatred,
disgust and an overall sense of
helplessness even
as his body writhed
in pain. His family
rushed him to the
nearby hospital in
nearby Kambha
town where his
physical wounds
were tended to. But

the emotional wound inflicted by the dominating caste may never heal.

However, Alubhai did not cow down to the violence. He decided to take the fight up legally and filed a complaint at the Kambha police station. Alubhai's awareness of the law made sure that

the police filed a case and registered an FIR under stringent sections of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

Despite the entire family having witnessed the crime and giving the police irrefutable evidence, the powerful Koli caste threatened Alubhai's family to withdraw the complaint and not pursue the matter.

The family even received death threats but has stood firm on the case.

DHRD activists have been in constant touch with the family to ensure that they have the right legal advice and help in pursuing the case.

The accused were immediately arrested by the police but were later granted bail under the condition that they will not enter the Taluka or the village.

This has given some comfort to Alubhai's family but others be-

longing to the Koli caste have tried to influence the case on behalf of the accused. In fact, the victim has sought Police protection but that has not been given.

One of the main demands raised by the family is compensation at the earliest for



that the victim's family has suffered.

They have initiated the process of seeking compensation with the concerned authorities. Their livelihood has been affected badly by the attack and the COVID-19 lockdown only made it difficult to recover from it, both physically for Alubhai and financially for the entire family. From a larger point of view, there needs to be enormous focus on addressing land rights issues in this area.

In fact, several Dalit organisations in Saurashtra have been working on ensuring that Dalits receive title and land records, but the scale of the problem is massive and requires enormous financial and physical resources.

In this case, some of the key issues that needs to be addressed urgently is the accused needs to be ordered to leave the district itself and the victim needs to be paid compensation and given police protection immediately.

Representational Image Credits:
Previous spread: Orthopaedic Specialists of Austin

Opposite Page: Reproduced from Crist BD, Khazzam M, Murtha YM, Della Rocca GJ: Pilon fractures: advances in surgical mgmt. J Am Acad Orthop Surg 2011; 19: 612-622.

### A Murder turned into a Suicide?

A young Dalit activist is abused by a politically powerful, dominant caste LPG dealer. The activist dies and the dominant castes claim he committed suicide



Narkhed Taluk of Nagpur district in the heart of Maharashtra, the Kunbi caste families, categorised as Other Backward Castes under the law, dominate the social dynamics. They are a majority and the Scheduled Castes, mainly those who were from the Mahar caste and later converted to Buddhism, have little say in administration or other issues.

32-year-old Arvind Bansod grew up against this caste backdrop but did not let caste compulsions go unchallenged. His family was progressive and owned a small piece of agricultural land and a house in the village. They had basic amenities, education and stood up for their rights.

From the time he was a boy, Arvind was known to be friendly, cooperative and helpful in the area. He reached out to those in need, even in other villages and as he grew older, he made it a mission to help people from the Scheduled Castes fight for their rights.

Despite formal education, Arvind chose to till the fields along with his father and two younger brothers for a livelihood. As the oldest son he had taken responsibility for protecting his family. He also took it upon himself to look out for other villagers in the area.

A few years ago, he started a rights campaign and used the Right to Information act to get details of several schemes for Scheduled Castes. He helped people apply for these schemes and took to grass root politics of the region.

Electoral politics in this belt is dominated by the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) which has a huge following amongst the dominant castes and Arvind wanted to change that. He had campaigned for progressive parties representing the voice of the downtrodden, Dalits and Tribals like the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi.

His political activity made him popular in the area and a threat to the dominant caste politicians.

The Umarkars are a powerful political family in the region and the head of the clan is Bandu Umarkar, a senior leader in the NCP. They belong to the Tridi section of the Kunbi caste and were perturbed by the challenge to their dominance by young Dalit activists, like Arvind.

However, neither the Umarkars nor Arvind confronted each other directly till the 27th of May 2020. On that fateful day Arvind and his friend Gajanan Raut went to the neighbouring Thadi Pawani village to withdraw money from the ATM. The pandemic was peaking in Maharashtra and the state had one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the country so Arvind wanted to stock himself with cash and fill fuel in his vehicle.

During this trip Arvind noticed a gas agency (LPG gas supply is essential service and gas agencies remained open during the lockdown) and took a picture of the board outside it. He wanted to share the phone number of the agency to those in need of LPG in his village, but that innocent act led to a violent assault.

Mayur Umarkar, who runs the agency, is the son of the local Sarpanch and relative of Bandu Umarkar. Mayur was annoyed at photos being taken of his gas agency and summoned Arvind and Gajanan and began questioning them on why they were taking photos with their cell phones.

Arvind tried to explain, but Mayur who had heard about the young Dalit's political activism recognised Arvind. He did not wait to hear his explanation and began speaking rudely.

Mayur began abusing Arvind and Gajanan and soon the verbal assault turned physical and a stunned Arvind and Gajanan were thrown out of the gas agency.

Shelke, another friend of Arvind, saw the assault and rushed to mitigate the situation, but Mayur and his accomplices continued to assault Arvind. They confiscated Arvind's mobile phone and a perplexed Arvind had no idea what to do next. He regained his composure and, according to a statement by Gajanan, told him to fill fuel in the bike while he would try to retrieve his mobile phone.

The next thing Gajanan claims was that he received a call announcing that Arvind had consumed poison and is being rushed to the hospital. This is a bizarre turn of events and the witness, Gajanan, has been under severe pressure from powerful caste groups.

It is not clear what exactly happened after Arvind went back to demand for his mobile phone and is extremely unlikely that he would have consumed poison. It simply does not seem to fit into the suicide theory as claimed by the accused.

It is a matter of fact that Arvind was poisoned and rushed to the Jalalkheda primary health care centre by the accused in the case Mayur Umarkar. Arvind was later rushed to the Nagpur Medical College Hospital in an ambulance and eventually died two days later on the 29th of May.

The facts of this case are simple:

A perfectly normal Dalit and Human rights defender whose mobile phone was confiscated by a politically powerful upper caste man is rushed to the hospital by the same upper caste group and dies in two days.

Shocked by the turn of events, Arvind's family grappled for answers. They demanded that an FIR be filed at the Jalkheda police station against Mayur Umarkar. It was filed but without sections of the stringent SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and only after enormous pressure from activist groups were the sections included on the 9th of June 2020.

It is only after that the accused, including Mayur Umarkar, were arrested by the police.

The family is convinced that there is not an iota of possibility that Arvind committed suicide. Neither was he depressed, nor did he ever even remotely suggest being suicidal and in a close-knit rural family, it is difficult to hide mental stress and difficulties from those in the same household.

Unfortunately, though several people were there in the area when the incident happened, almost all of them belong to the same caste and political party that the Umarkars belong to. Most witnesses claimed to the police that it was a case of suicide and there was no altercation between Mayur Umarkar and Arvind.

Not even those from the Dalit community, who privately praised Arvind, dared to challenge the accused. They all fear that the powerful political family with connections straight to the level of Home Minister of the State could destroy their lives and livelihood.

Unfortunately, even Arvind's friend Gajanan has changed his statement at times and Arvind's family fears that he may also be under pressure from the Umarkars. This has made any investigation into the case difficult and the possibility of Arvind being forced to consume poison by the Umarkars remains shoddily probed.

Despite these difficulties the party that Arvind campaigned for, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi, along with the Bhim Army and Samta Sainik Dal in Nagpur have kept up their campaign on the case. DHRD's Kapil Shivsharan who works with Manuski and the Centre for Development and Social Justice Studies has been in touch with Arvind's family and, with legal support from Manuski, has been closely monitoring the case.

Despite these efforts all the accused are out on bail and several people who came forward to help initially have backed off.
There is an urgent need to strengthen the case and assist the Special Public Prosecutor and to provide monetary assistance to the family for fighting the battle of justice.

Image Credits: Nidhin Shobhna



### No Lockdown for Merciless Police Assault

'Upper' caste policemen go on a rampage in a Dalit colony and brutally assault youth during the lockdown



ost Dalit families in the Vikaliya village of Botad district in Gujarat's Saurashtra region have received basic education and own agricultural land. While this has ensured that they are not dependent on the 'upper' castes for a livelihood, it does not guarantee social equality in a caste-entrenched feudal landscape.

Dalits here are predominantly from Rohit and Vankar communities and even though the Sarpanch of the village is a Dalit, they live in a separate Dalit cluster, far away from where the 'upper' caste homes are located.

They are not usually invited to public functions in the village when food is served and if they are, they will have to eat separately from the other castes.

While the Sarpanch has ensured several basic development projects for the village, she has not been able to break the shackles of caste discrimination.

The Leuva Patels are the numerically and politically dominant caste of the region, but the Darbars, Rabaris, Kolis and Bharwad castes have significant influence in the village. The Darbars, like in other places, aggressively assert themselves with strong arm tactics.

24-year-old Ankitbhai Raghavbhai Vaniya grew up in the Vakaliya village's Dalit confines and lived with the dream that one day his generation would grow over caste differences and feel a sense of equality. He is a graduate in commerce and lives in a large joint family with his two married sisters, two brothers and parents in two adjoining houses.

The family owns a few bighas of land amounting to 2 or 3 acres and works the soil to earn a livelihood. Most Dalit families in the area own similar small holdings of land and substitute farm income with casual labour and other sources.

While their ancestors worked as labourers for the 'upper' castes, ownership of land has given the Dalits in the area a sense of independence and dignity of labour.

Ankitbhai's dream of equality came crashing down soon after the nation-wide lockdown to contain the Coronavirus was announced. The lockdown came into force on the 24th of March and the Lok Rakshak Dal, a reserve force of the Gujarat police was posted across the state to help local police officials enforce it.

Every village had barricades and strict monitoring of movement. But the lockdown was announced in haste and several people needed to find ways to buy essentials. An innocent 14-year-old Dalit boy from Vikaliya had stepped out to search for provision stores that could be open and, unfortunately, ran into the Lok Rakshak Dal unit. Most of the members of this unit were from the Darbar caste and there was a lone Dalit jawan.

The policemen shouted at the boy, but far from being intimidated the young boy replied to them and began explaining why he had stepped out.

Heady on the blanket power given to them to enforce the lockdown, the jawans began shouting at the boy.

The boy began running towards the area of his village with the jawans chasing after him. Reaching the area where the Dalits live, they physically assaulted the boy and threatened him to not step out of his house.

When the older people of the area heard the commotion, they scolded the jawans and asked them to leave. This infuriated the Darbar caste jawans and they planned a brutal assault on the locality.

They returned, claiming they were enforcing the lockdown rules and dragged 12 young men, in the age group of 17 to 25, including Ankitbhai, and began thrashing them for being outside their houses. Families of the victims and old women in the area begged the jawans for mercy, but the law enforcers behaved like hooligans.

The 12 young men were dragged to the police station where they were tortured. They were made to lie on cold stone and their backs were lashed with sticks and batons. The assault went on for a few hours.

For no fault of theirs, 12 Dalit boys were mercilessly beaten by the police force. When some boys spoke against this atrocity, all they received was casteist slurs from the jawans.

Finally, the assault stopped only after the Sarpanch rushed to the police station to

save the boys. The arrival of the leader of the village ensured that the police had to release the Dalit youth and they were all rushed to the local health center for treatment.

When the incident came to the attention of the DHRD network, activists rushed to the police station. The police realized that the involvement of activists would bolster the case of the victims and as a counter measure the local police filed a false case against the boys for violating the lockdown and assaulting the police force.

Disturbingly, the police ensured that the complaint was filed by the lone Dalit jawan in the Lok Rakshak Dal team that was involved in the assault, to gain credibility. It is most likely that the jawan was forced by his colleagues to file the case.

When the DHRD team tried to investigate the matter and meet the victims, the police stamped the victims with Covid-19 seals and put them in home quarantine. This made it impossible to carry out a thorough investigation into the atrocity.

The victims could not even protest due to the lockdown and the activists were also forced into home quarantine. Connivingly, the law enforcement authorities used the lockdown and a pandemic as an excuse to cover up a brazen caste atrocity. The police had also included the names of two DHRD activists in the case to intimidate the activist's team.

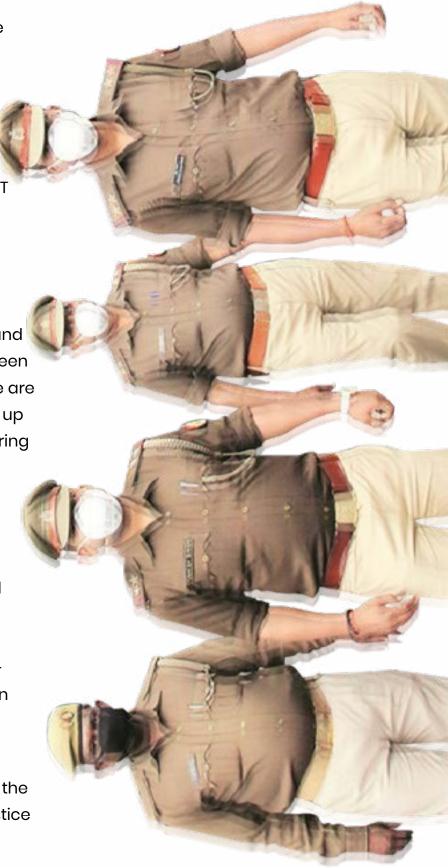
A case has also been filed against the Sub-Inspector of the police station Raval, Khumanbhai Lathidal Vala and 9 others of the Lok Rakshak Dal by the victims and there is a campaign for justice launched on social media. In fact, the police did not include SC/ST PoA sections in the complaint filed by the victims and only did so after pressure from activists.

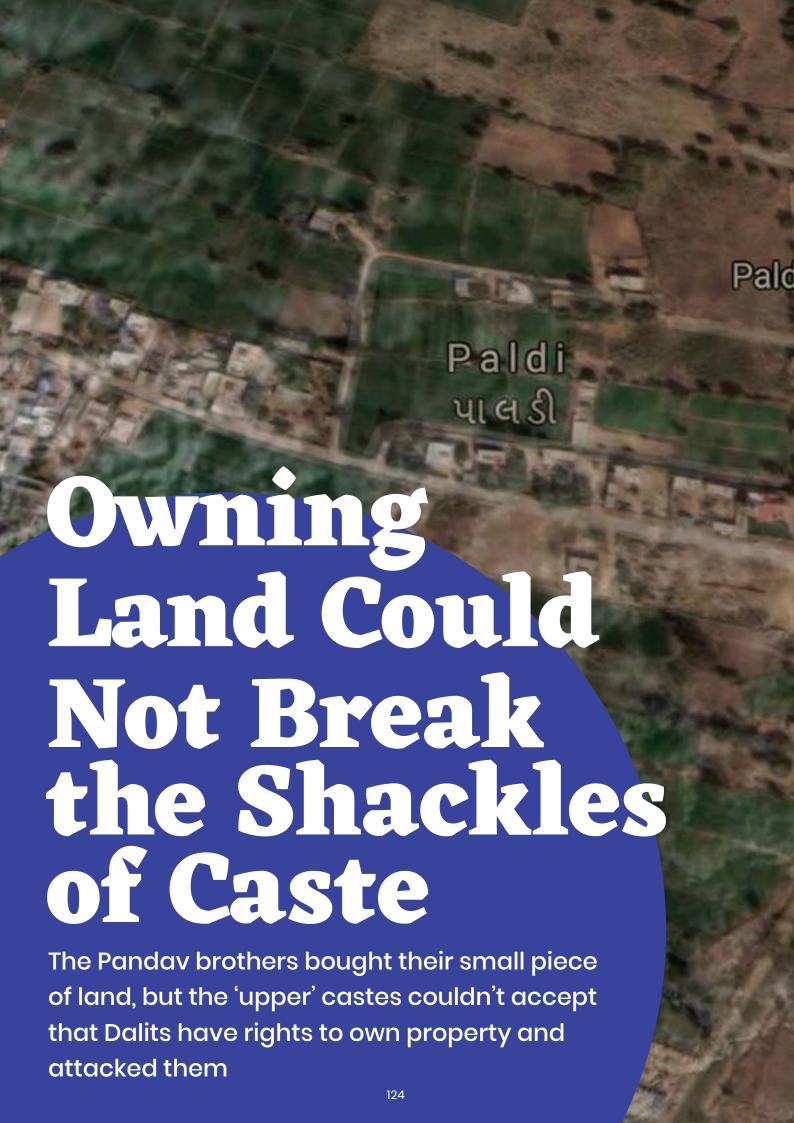
In times of lockdown, social media campaigns are the only way to demand justice in such cases and DHRD has been actively involved in this process. There are also discussions on taking the matter up in the High Court of Gujarat and ensuring that the accused are punished.

Given the fact that the police force is the accused in this case, there is a desperate need for the case and investigations to be done by a neutral authority. The police have filed a chargesheet in both—the case they filed and the one filed by the victims—but it is obvious that their investigation cannot be trusted in this matter.

High level unbiased intervention from the system and judicial monitoring of the matter may be essential to deliver justice to the victims at Vikaliya.

Image Credit:
Previous Spread: Gujarat Exclusive
Above: Indian Express





paldi village is in the vicinity of the bustling Ahmedabad city and is one of those rare green pockets in a region dominated by factories.

Agriculture remains the mainstay in this village located near Dholka town with a population of over 2,000 people.

48-year-old Prahladbhai Pandav and his family of agricultural labourers from the Scheduled caste Vankar community live off the small piece of land they own at the Paldi village. The Pandavs are five brothers who stay together in a joint family with their wives, children and mother.

Together the brothers work day and night to reap a livelihood. All of them crowd into one temporary house and small permanent structure. Life is hard for the Pandavs, but since they own a piece of land they live with dignity.

Like the Pandavs, 70 families from the Vankar community live in the village in a secluded colony for Dalits. The castes are clearly segregated and though the dominant castes engage Dalits for labour on their fields, they make sure that the Dalits live segregated.

They are not allowed entry to the village temple, not invited to public functions and when invited they will have to eat separately. Not even donations from Dalits are accepted for building of temple or religious activities and even in death they are segregated in a separate cemetery for Dalits.

Such regressive and humiliating caste impositions continue in this village despite

its proximity to a major city and awareness and education amongst Dalits about their rights. They simply endure the caste humiliation and survive, like the Pandav brothers.

The numerically dominant caste in this village is the Bharwad community which constitutes around 17 percent of the population, but there are other 'upper' caste communities like the Barbar, Kolis and Patels who own land in the village.

In the hope that some economic progress could relieve them from the shackles of caste, the Pandav brothers had bought 2 bighas of land in the village with their hard-earned savings. They had bought the land from a Barbar caste family. The Barbars have a very small numerical presence and sold the land as they were themselves having trouble from the dominant Bharwad castes.

The Pandav brothers thought that if they bought the land and got it legally registered, they would have financial security and since the Barbars agreed to sell they went ahead.

More than 50 percent of Dalits work as laborers for meagre wages and the others own small pieces of land.

The Pandavs wanted to make the transition from the landless to the landed and this was their only chance.

Little did they know that the Bharwads would come after them.

The Bharwad families in the village are known for their muscle power and intimidation tactics in grabbing land. They even purposely throw all their garbage near the Dalit colony in the village and harass the vulnerable.

The Bharwads decided to intimidate the Pandav family and throw them out of the land that they had bought. They simply could not stand the fact that a Dalit family could buy land owned by the castes. But the Pandav brothers had put all their life savings into this land and decided to stay firm and stand up for their rights.

On the 14th of May Pravinbhai Godadbhai Bharwad, notorious for his muscle power, along with eight other men from his caste went on a rampage in the Dalit colony. The attackers were armed with sticks and rods and carried out a merciless assault on the Panday brothers.

Several Dalits in the area witnessed the assault, but the Bharwads were well prepared and armed and no one could fight them off. The Pandav family suffered the brunt of the assault and all the brothers were severely injured. Even the women were not spared and suffered injuries.

Despite the Dalits being larger in number they do not dare to retaliate to such assaults. The Bharwads simply wanted to reiterate their caste dominance and they had the support of the local police force. Adding insult to injury, after the assault the Bharwads filed a case against the Dalits and that led to the arrest of 11 Dalits in the

area for 4 days. This is a classic example of caste brutality. First the accused assault the Dalits mercilessly and then they use the law enforcement authorities to harass the victims.

The simple message to the Dalits was to silently suffer indignity and not stand up to the dominant castes. This is the plight in a village where there is both awareness and is in touch with social activists.

It is only after repeated appeals that the police filed a case against the Bharwads and - Pravinbhai Godadbhai Bharwad and 8 others were named in an FIR filed under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

As is often the case, the Bharwads have used the case they filed against the Dalits as a threat and means to negotiate the Dalits from pursuing the case of assault seriously. Despite being victims, the Dalits were arrested and had to seek bail from the courts for their release.

The Bharwads too managed to get bail in time and are not in custody. Even five months after the complaint was registered a chargesheet has not been filed in the case. It is only if the case is taken to trial will the Pandavs get some semblance of justice but the police seems to be working hand in glove with the accused.

The larger issue of cases being filed against victims by the 'upper' castes needs to be addressed urgently and requires attention of the courts, perhaps,

through a Public Interest Litigation.
The police also often close cases with shoddy investigation and this needs to be addressed.

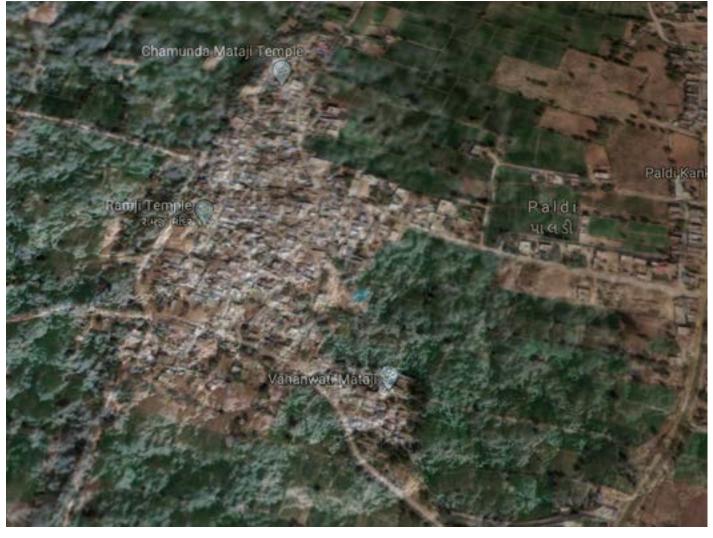
In this case there has been coordination of the local organization-DHRD and the local lawyers with the victim's family and has helped in taking the case forward. There is a demand for police protection for the victim that has been raised but remains unattended. Image Credit: Rajyashri Goody

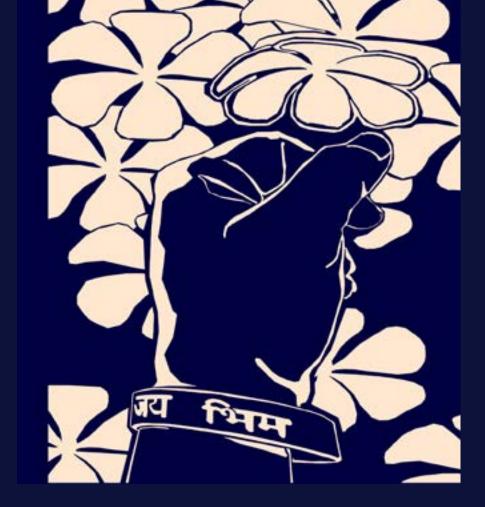
Concept note by artist:

I see the atrocity that took place in Paldi not as an isolated incident but an outcome of the evil spewed by the caste system across the region. This evil has been brewing for a long, long time, ever since the Manusmriti was penned thousands of years ago. Although many may not have read the text, such is its power that its words have managed to seep deep into the minds of our land and its people.

To illustrate this, I made pulp from the Manusmriti, mixed it in green colouring, and made a sculptural piece with it. I then added the map of Paldi and its surrounding areas onto it, signifying how it is still drowning in the words of Manu.

This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti social media campaign called #LockDownCasteAtrocities.





## Spurned by her lover's caste, Sowmya takes her own Life

A Dalit girl kills herself after her caste Hindu husband abandons her and the village tells her to take money and forget him n 2nd of October 2020, as India observed the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, 19-year-old Sowmya died in a hospital bed at Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu. Her tragic life story is testimony that more than 70 years after India's independence, Dalits struggle for justice in the country.

Sowmya lost her mother, Palani Ammal, when she was just 10 days old. Unable to raise her on his own, her father left the infant with his parents. Her grandfather 65-year-old Srinivasan had married twice, and both the wives Salit and Raja were grandmothers who helped raise Sowmya.

The below poverty line family belonged to the Scheduled Caste Parayar community and lived in a small hut in Karimangalam village in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu. The district falls under the region of influence of the powerful OBC Vanniyar caste in Tamil Nadu who use their political clout to ferociously enforce their caste identity.

A majority of the population in Karimangalam are Dalits and they also own large tracts of land, but Srinivasan, like the most downtrodden amongst the Dalits, survives on daily wage and performs menial and often inhuman tasks, like cleaning of toilets and sewerage, for a livelihood. Sowmya had studied up to her 10th standard and tried to augment the family income with whatever work she could do.

Despite Dalits owning land, the Vanniyars control the social hierarchy. Dalit localities

are clearly demarcated and Dharmapuri district is known for horrendous caste atrocities. In 2012, nearly 300 Dalit houses were set on fire by a mob of the Vanniyar castes in the Natham area after an inter caste marriage led to the suicide of the father of a Vanniyar boy.

The incident serves as a horrific reminder of the brutal retaliation that the caste groups are capable of when their diktats are violated and that a union of hearts in marriage will have to have the approval of the castes. It took a deployment of over 1,000 policemen to control the mobs.

There was little doubt about the power of caste in Sowmya's mind. But the 19-year-old Dalit girls' heart could not help falling in love with a much younger 17-year-old Manish Kumar from the dominant Vanniyar caste. It was illegal to marry a minor under the law and that made this inter caste love an impossible reality for marriage.

However, the two eloped and married each other at a temple in February without the consent of Manish's family. The couple lived together in different places around the area hiding from the boy's family. Manish's family searched for the couple with all their caste clout and found the couple 90 days after their marriage.

The powerful family took the boy away and the helpless girl could do little to stop them. She tried desperately to reason out with them that they were married but her pleas fell on deaf years.

She had nowhere else to go but to return to her grandparents.

After a few weeks she went to the boy's house to get her husband back, but to her horror in the month of August Manish told her he does not want to live with her.

Manish was under pressure from his parents to disown the marriage and he did so.

Manish's father Mahalingam, mother
Ranjitham and uncle Murugar told the girl
she had no further business in their house
and asked Sowmya to leave their son.
They hurled casteist abuses at her and
her husband did nothing to defend her
honour.

This broke Sowmya's faith, the girl rushed to the Kambainallur police station nearby to file a complaint and seek help. It was help from the local civil society organisation and activists from the Dalit political party Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi that gave the victim the courage to file a police complaint.

However, despite involvement of activists, instead of taking the matter to a juvenile court or protect inter caste couples as ordered by the Apex court of India, the police told the girl to settle the matter with village elders who run Kangaroo courts or 'Katta' Panchayats as they are known in this part of India.

These courts are ruled by the castes and ordered the girl, with her frail grandfather, to be present before it. The risk of a physical

assault hangs over the Dalits in such cases and there is no option to disobey or challenge the verdict of such caste groups.

Clearly siding with the dominant caste family, the court ordered the girl to accept some money as compensation and let go of the marriage. Manish Kumar also coldly told her he did not want to live with her, and this broke Sowmya's heart and spirit.

Insulted, humiliated and heartbroken,
Sowmya struggled to cope with life. She
hoped one day her love would return, but
the young husband had turned his back
for good. Sowmya was known for her
boldness, positivity in the area, but all of it
had vanished with the way her marriage
ended.

Struggling to recover from the stigma, Sowmya consumed poison and though she was rushed to hospital, after 22 days of struggle, on the 2nd of October 2020, she died.

Her story is a reminder of the sheer callousness of the authorities and caste groups to the plight of a girl. While the boy was a minor and that raises legal issues, the matter ought to have been decided by constitutionally set up systems and not a caste group.

The poor Dalit family has little resources to fight against the castes and there is a huge question mark over whether there will be justice for Sowmya.

DHRD network organisation Evidence has assisted the victims along with local

activists and an abetment to suicide case has been filed against Manish Kumar and his family. The case filed, no 737/2020, includes section 174(3) and 306 of IPC and SC/ST (prevention of atrocity) Act 2015 section 3(1)(r),3(1)(s) &3(2)(v) and Manish has been sent to juvenile correction facility till trial begins in the case.

Activist Dharmadurai associated with Evidence along with other local members have taken several steps to collate evidence through fact finding visits to ensure that the victim's family has all necessary documentation to receive compensation.

Following this a formal complaint was prepared and sent to several institutions in the state to seek assistance and justice for the victim's family. The issue also highlighted the need for women activists at the field level to speak to victims in such cases.

There is also great need to create awareness and launch campaigns to sensitize the police force in cases of inter caste marriages and ensure they follow the apex court orders. Village courts or 'Kattai' Panchayats delivering verdicts in the case of inter caste relationships has led to even honour killings around the country and only strong criminal action against the practice could put an end to it.

Image Credit: Rahee Punyashloka



# A Voice of Justice Murdered in the Desert

Advocate Devjibhai Maheswari was stabbed to death outside his office in a crowded street after he took up a case that the 'upper' castes had threatened lawyers not to take



The desert sands of Kutch district in Gujarat are a fertile ground for caste atrocities. In fact, the remoteness of the district, located in India's international border with Pakistan, with distance between its desert towns has only made it harder to break feudal shackles.

It is against this backdrop that Devjibhai Maheswari, a 52-year-old lawyer, used all his education and knowledge to deliver justice to the weakest of the weak in social hierarchy at Rapar in Kutch.

As a senior leader of the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), Devjibhai had challenged several politically powerful entities and was respected by all his colleagues.

Married to Meenakshiben, who was equally committed to fight for the rights of the downtrodden and worked as a primary school teacher, the couple have two beautiful daughters. But once he took a case Devjibhai would not be cowed down even by threats to his picture-perfect family and his life.

This was why he was revered by the poor as, perhaps, the only hope to defend their legal rights and honour. Till his last breath he did exactly that.

Though he belonged to the Scheduled Caste Maheshwari community, Devjibhai, in early September 2020, decided to fight a case for the economically weak Luhar (blacksmith) community which falls under the Other Backward Caste category.

In this part of Gujarat, the dominant Sodha-Rajput community dictates the political landscape. They are closely involved in several illegal activities and are notorious for their nexus with the police. They also own most of the land and though Dalits and other oppressed castes own land in the area they cannot challenge the caste supremacy of the Rajputs.

Using this dominance, the Rajputs had used brutal force to take over a community hall of the Luhar community. Devjibhai, who had led several successful cases to get land rights for the Dalits, decided to take up the case for the Luhars.

In fact, several lawyers in Rapar had refused to take the case as they were afraid of threats from the Rajputs and were worried when Devjibhai took the matter up. He was aware that his life was in danger, but it did not matter to the brave lawyer.

Just a week after he had taken the case, on the 25th of September, Devjibhai had gone to his office like any other day. It was a small office in the narrow lanes of Rapar and right next to it was the locally well-known Pav Bhaji cart of Bhurabhai.

At around 4pm, just as the narrow lane was beginning to get crowded for evening shopping, Devjibhai parked his car across the road and took out his files. He was getting ready to meet his clients at his small office.

No one knew that it would be the last time he would cross that crowded lane.

As soon as Devjibhai entered his office Bharatbhai Raval who was waiting for him in the office charged at him and stabbed him multiple times and ran away. In broad daylight in a busy street a veteran lawyer was lying in a pool of blood. Like in hundreds of other cases, the brutal message from the castes was that no one could challenge the dominant.

The Pav Bhaji vendors, shopkeepers, were

all in shock as they saw the tragedy unfold. The smiling and cheerful Devjibhai was battling for his life. A few of them mustered the courage and rushed Devjibhai to the local Shubham hospital, but the hospital refused treatment.

The hospital was worried about getting involved in a medico legal case and, perhaps, backlash from the castes. Precious minutes were lost and

any chance of saving his life faded.

Devjibhai died and with him died the hope for justice for thousands of downtrodden.

The Sodha-Rajputs are suspected to have hired Raval to eliminate Devjibhai. Initially, the police, who have close links with the Rajputs, suggested that Devjibhai's murder was a hate crime and retaliation against his Facebook posts. This would have

shielded the powerful Rajputs from the case.

Fortunately, activists were quick to react and Meenakshiben stood firm that she would not accept her husband's body till her complaint naming the Rajputs was taken seriously. They had to ensure that the police do not connive with the accused and dilute the case.

Devjibhai was cremated only on the 28th September, 3 days after his death as the family and activists led their demand for

a case even before cremation. Huge crowds had gathered for the funeral and the issue received national press coverage and that eventually forced the police to investigate the matter thoroughly.

Bharat Raval along with eight others belonging to the Rajput caste were arrested by the police and a case of murder along with sections under the SC/ST Prevention

of Atrocities act was filed.



While the case has been spearheaded by the BAMCEF, DHRD network contacted the victim's family soon after the incident and offered legal advice. Since the victim was a well-known activist and lawyer, local DHRD network members were aware of the incident and spoke to Meenakshiben

and sought legal advice from senior lawyers at the High Court.

An application was submitted to the Home Department and Chief Minister of Gujarat in coordination with local organizations and committees of justice for Devjibhai in about 18 districts.

It is important to note that Devjibhai's murder must be probed as a pre-planned conspiracy and the net must be cast on all caste organisations and leadership in the area. There is a demand for a CBI probe in the case as the local police are close to the dominant castes.

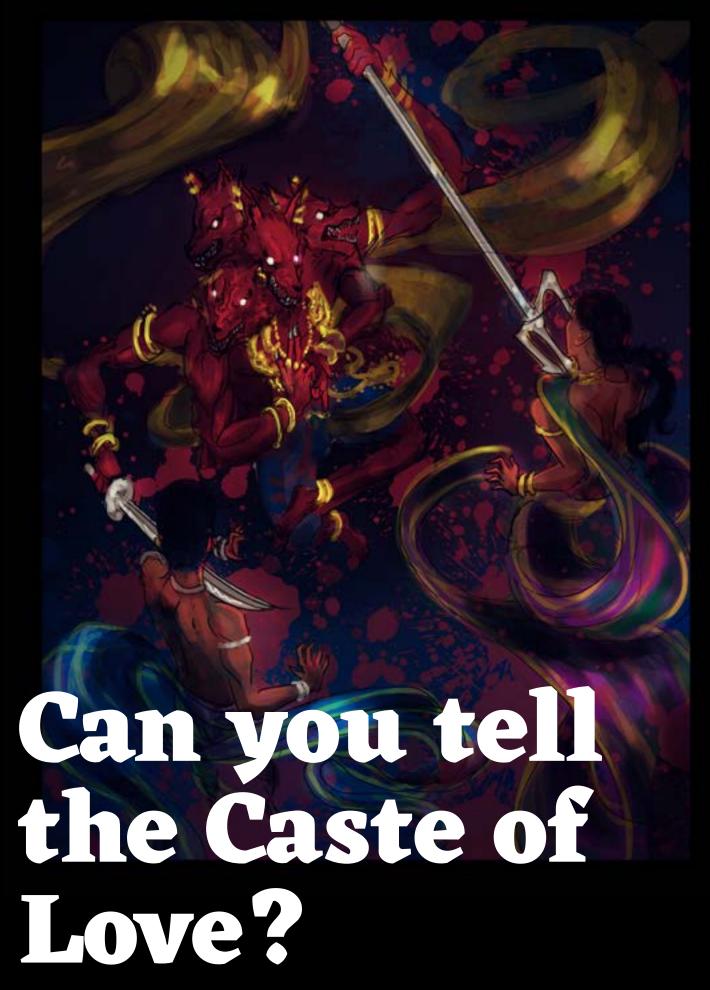
Suspension of licence of the Shubham hospital which refused to treat Devjibhai is a key demand and a speedy trial with the strictest of punishments for the guilty is imperative. It is also important to provide Meenakshiben and her daughters with 'Y' category security and witnesses must be protected as well.

As per the provisions of the Atrocities Act, a reputed senior [criminal] advocate should be appointed as the public prosecutor and one family member should be given a government job and compensation of atleast 50 lakh rupees.

Reference:

thewire.in/article/rights/devjibhai-maheshwari-kutch-lawyer-murder-bamcef-anti-caste-struggle-land-rights/amp

Image Credits: thewire.in



A newlywed Dalit couple is attacked by his caste Hindu wife's family and the girl is abducted in broad daylight n the 21st of April 2020, amidst the most rigorous phase of the nationwide lockdown, at 5.30 AM, 25-year-old Banupriya was knocking on the doors of her lover—27-year-old Muruganandam at the Tennagar Street near Karambakudy, Pudukkottai District of Tamil Nadu.

It's like a scene straight out of an Indian movie script. The girl wanted to get married to the boy she had loved for three years. She had eloped from her family in the dead of the night and came to her lover for refuge.

Muruganandam's family was taken aback. They knew about the love story between Banupriya and their son. But they also knew that caste was too strong a barrier. They were a poor Dalit family and Banupriya belonged to the dominant caste.

Muruganadam's family, like thousands of Dalit families in the country, thought their son's life was more valuable than the love he had for the girl. They feared that a full-scale riot would follow if her family finds that she had come to their house and if the two were married off.

But when the girl landed on their door step, they saw the commitment the two had for each other. They also realized that the girl had no choice and her family had threatened to kill her if she continued to love the boy. Hurriedly the two were married at 6:30 AM. A wedding that was fixed and performed in a hurry to ensure that caste did not come in the way.

Banupriya felt that once the marriage had taken place her family had no choice but to accept the reality and over a period of time, they would endorse it as well.

However, caste anger is beyond reason, love, and the law.

Just an hour after the wedding Banupriya's family, which lives nearby, retaliated. Her brother Balakrishnan (24), brother-in-law Rangasamy and his son Anand along with more than 15 people from their caste landed at Muruganandam's door step.

Muruganandam was an MBA and has a bright future in the corporate world, much better than several boys from the caste that Banupriya belonged to. But to her family all that mattered was the caste of the man she married and not the happiness she would be covered with.

Banupriya's brother and the mob began verbally abusing Muruganandam's family with casteist slurs. They wanted revenge and the girl back. Little did the fact that she had married of her own will matter to them. This is not just a case of violence against a Dalit; it is equally a case of violence against a woman and her free will.

The mob had arrived with weapons like knives and wooden logs. Their intent was to mercilessly attack the Dalit family and abduct the girl. They did just that. The girl who had run from the injustice of her family to her lover's security was physically abducted and taken back home.



And, before taking her they brutally attacked Muruganandam and his family. The young post graduate in management was beaten up as he tried to stop them from taking his wife. He could not stop the physical might of the caste mob from taking his love away. He wasn't a movie action hero and his love was snatched away from him just a couple of hours after marriage.

Evidence, a civil society organization came to his rescue when it heard about his case. Swiftly activists from Evidence called top police officials and informed them of the incident. The police rushed to Banupriya's residence and rescued the girl and returned his wife to Muruganandam.

A case was moved at the Madurai branch of the Madras High Court and it ordered protection for Muruganandam and his family. Such protection is the only solace they get from the threat of caste attack and despite these measures the family, and the couple, live under the fear of a caste backlash.

Muruganandam and Banupriya aren't the only Dalit-caste Hindu love story in the state. There are thousands of such cases

and though love knows no caste, caste can kill both love and the people in it.

Many such cases have had tragic endings and in others the lovers surrendered to their fears and parted ways. Only in some did love triumph caste. Like Muruganandam and Banupriya, in Kottaipatti, Ambedkar town near Nilakkottai in Dindigul district Tamilselvan, who is a Dalit, and Kavitha from the dominant caste married in 2018.

Marriage is not the end of caste in a love story and Kavitha and Tamilselvan would realize that a year later, during the lockdown. Their marriage in 2018 was the culmination of a hard fought, four-yearold love story.

The couple fled to Periyakulam in the nearby Theni district after their marriage and lived there happily. They had twins in the last two years and thought the birth of the next generation was an end to their caste troubles.

On the 21st of April 2020 when they reached their Kottaipatti village they thought that no one would bother about their arrival and Kavitha's family would have gone past thehate. But caste hate can last a life time and beyond.

The details of their visit reached Kavitha's family. On the 27th of April 2020 at 5.40 pm about 55 people from the dominant caste came as a menacing mob to the Dalit settlement where Tamilselvan's family lived.

They carried dangerous weapons like knives, swords and wooden logs. It was abundantly clear that the caste anger had not died in the last two years. The intent of the mob was to kill the couple and teach a lesson to all such young couples. It did not matter to them that a daughter of their caste would be a victim; they just wanted blood as if the colour of blood knew caste.

Fortunately, Kavitha and Tamilselvan were saved by youth from the Dalit community and taken to nearby Nilakottai. Their lives were saved and they learnt a lesson that even their twins could not undo the deep-rooted caste hatred.

A case has been registered at the Wattalakundu police station under sections 147, 323, 506 (1) of the IPC. But no case was registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Torture Act. Such a case would be stronger and mean non-bailable offence against the accused. Evidence is set to file a lawsuit in court in this case and ensure that the right sections are invoked in it.

Shockingly, a false case has been registered against the Dalit youth who rescued the couple. It is only after intervention by Evidence that police have

agreed to drop charges against the Dalit youth who saved Tamilselvan and Banupriya.

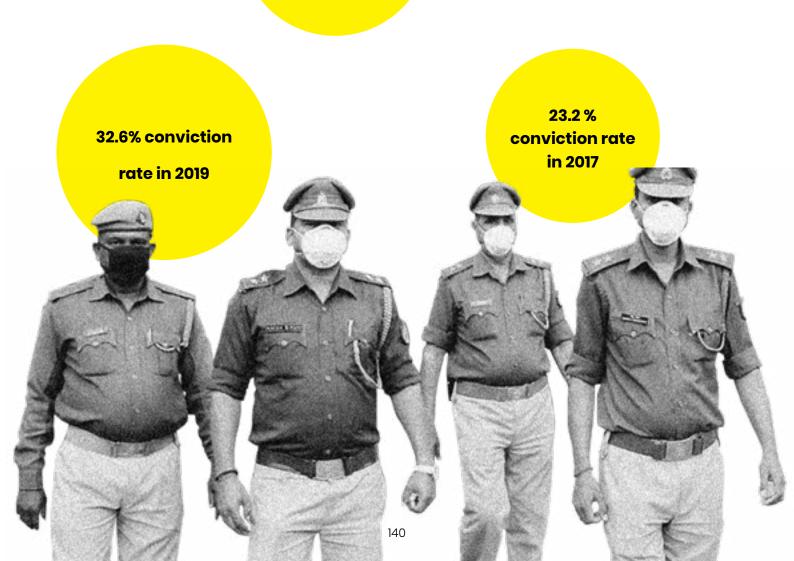
Five cases of dishonour killings, where lovers from caste Hindu groups and Dalits have been punished by death, have been recorded during the Coronavirus lockdown in Tamil Nadu. This apart, there have been 6 incidents of violent attacks on intermarriage couples during this lockdown period.

All this only shows that love and the lockdown cannot contain caste animosity!

Image Credit: Shreyash Ramteke
This artwork was created for the DHRDNet and Public Bolti
social media campaign called
#LockDownCasteAtrocities.

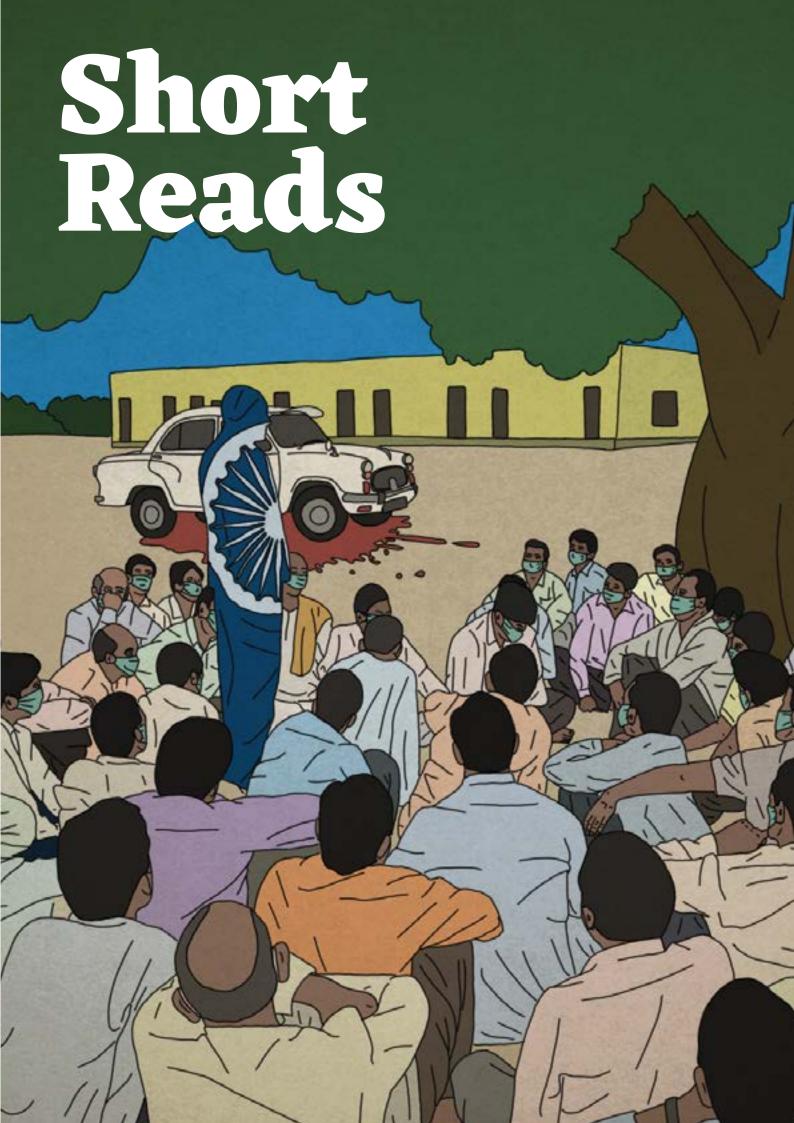
### Conviction Rate under PoA Act

29.88 % conviction rate in 2018 Lowest conviction rate is in Gujarat with 1.8%



25.7 % conviction rate in 2016





### Assertion of Dalit Identity Crushed

Name: Sanjaybhai Govindbhai Vaghela

Date of FIR: 7.11. 2020 FIR No: 11190006200663

### Community:

35 Dalit families (Rohit, Vankar and Valmiki community), Dominant castes are 60-70 families of Bharwad; 50 families of Muslims; 100 families of Rajput and 50 families of Kathi Darbar.

Location: Bagad village, Ranpur block, Botad district, Gujarat



25-year-old Sanjaybhai Govindbhai Vaghela, with his prominent moustache, strong build, riding on a horse, is a powerful symbol of caste assertion. He is a trader of cows and horses, occasionally working as a casual labourer as well. His family is part of the 35 Dalit families in his village, where caste is dominated by the Rajputs and Kathi-Darbar families. However, Sanjaybhai ensures he is seen and treated as an equal to the 'Upper' castes.

His overt assertions never went down well with the Darbars and on the 6th of November 2020 they brutally asserted themselves on the proud Dalit. Sanjaybhai was riding on his bike when he noticed a group of youth outside the village and asked them if they needed a ride to the village. He did not realize that they were waiting to attack him. The group pounced on Sanjaybhai and beat him up with rods and sticks. They stabbed him with a knife and slashed the main artery in his leg leaving him in a critical state. He was rushed to the Bhavnagar hospital, where he continues to battle for life.

Several years ago, Sanjaybhai's father, Govindbhai, was elected as the Sarpanch of the village on a reserved seat, but the Darbars treated Govindbhai badly and refused to even let him sit on the village Sarpanch's chair. Sanjaybhai saw all these atrocities as a child and grew into a vociferous defender of Dalit and human rights. This is what angered the castes and is suspected to have led to the attack on him.

The Dalit families in the village live in fear of the Darbars and have been threatened against coming forward to support the investigations. The Darbars also have strong contacts in the police and have tried to misguide investigations. In a shocking turn of events, the police have booked Sanjaybhai and he is under their custody even as he is recovering at the hospital.

### CURRENT STATUS

There have been several difficulties in providing assistance as local organisations have not been of help and there are no Civil Society Organizations active in the area. Sanjaybhai is still recovering from the attack at the hospital and that has led to delays in taking the case forward. DHRD network activists are following up in the case and providing legal assistance. An urgent need is to obtain bail for Sanjaybhai and provide him with police protection.

Image Credits: Rahee Punyashloka

### The Lull before the Storm

Name: Velmurugan

Age: 48 years old

Date of FIR: 7.11. 2020

Occupation: Daily wager

FIR No: 04.07.2020 FIR No: 222/2020

Community:

Velmurugan belongs to Scheduled caste

(Hindu Paraiyar community)

Water in Pathaikkam colony,

Paraparammalpuram, Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu is supplied through a common pipe and people have to stand in a line to fill their vessels for water every day. There is limited supply of water so everyone is expected to be mindful of the fact that there is always a long line of people waiting to get their turn to fetch water. On 03.07.2020 around 8.30 AM, Velmurugan, father of three sons was waiting for his turn to fill the vessels. Three dominant caste men Kughanantham, Rajagopal and Prem were fetching water from the common pipe line at that time. They seemed to be filling vessels for a long time so Velmurugan requested them to take limited amount of water. The three men immediately got into a heated argument with Velmurugan. People around them somehow calmed the situation and everyone went back home. It seemed like the situation was resolved but the calm was just the lull before the storm that was about to descend on Velmurugan. At around 9:30 AM, Kughanantham, Rajagopal and Prem charged at Velmurugan with swords and attacked him viciously. They shouted, "Who the hell are you to tell us not to fetch water, men of bitches!" Velmurugan's younger brother Subash, and first son Sathish desperately tried to save Velmurugan but all the victims were severely injured in the attack.

### CURRENT STATUS

A case is booked at Vijayanarayanam police station with FIR no. 222/2020, under section 294(b), 307, 342, 324, 506(2), 3(1)(r), 3(1)(s), 3(2)(va) of the the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015.

Support is required for regular follow up of case procedural progress in coordination with police officials. Government should provide proper treatment for victim.

Compensation, assistance and protection to the victim is also an urgent necessity.

Image Credits: Sunil Awchar



# Education is No Protection from Violence

Name: Vickybaba Patil

Age: 28 years old

FIR Date: 17/04/2020

FIR No. 171/2020, Narkhed Police Station, Nagpur

Community:

Victim belongs to Buddhist community.

Buddhist are a marginal number in the village in comparison with the OBC population

Location: Yerla Indora, Narkhed Taluka in Nagpur District of Maharashtra

Vicky is a highly qualified and well employed son to a proud mother and father, who work as farmers in Yerla Indora, Narkhed taluka in Nagpur district of Maharashtra. During the lockdown Vicky observed that their neighbouring community celebrated Hanuman Jayanti peacefully. So, Vicky gathered few friends on 14th April 2020 to celebrate their ideal Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary. They strictly adhered to all Covid-19 precautionary measures. However, Sagar Adghode and a few other

families expressed their displeasure. Vicky and his friends did not want to offend anyone so they let this discriminatory behaviour pass.

Sagar Adghode is a big land owner from the dominant OBC caste. He was irked by Vicky's education and rise in the society.

He had been looking for an opportunity to bring them down. The opportunity came in the name of Fuse, who helps Vicky's father in the farms. Fuse is an elderly gentleman with a severe stammering problem. Sagar's employee Hivase decided to target him. So, every time Hivase saw Fuse he would make fun of his stammering. One day when Fuse protested, Hivase just slapped him. When Vicky heard of this humiliating incident on 16th April 2020, he

questioned Hivase who got very annoyed and warned Vicky that he will face serious consequences. On the same day, in about 15-20 minutes Vicky was stopped by Hivase and Sagar Adghode at a railway crossing, when he was traveling back to his house. They spurted casteist slurs at him and shouted, "You think you have become a leader by celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti!" Vicky was brutally beaten up by Sagar and his men. An enraged Vicky tried to register the complaint on the same day, however police kept avoiding and finally

registered on the next day 17th April 2020.
The accused have lodged a counter complaint making all kinds of false accusations on Vicky and his family to intimidate him further.

CURRENT STATUS

Victim has sought support as he can see

that he has a long and complicated battle for justice. Civil society organisations like Manuski and Political Party, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi have come forward to support Vicky. Currently, Manuski is working towards getting the wrongly registered FIR and charge sheet dropped. The accused are out on bail.



Image Credits: Yogesh Barve

## Hacked to Death Over Land Dispute

Name: Ramachandran aka Arasu

Age: 43 years old

FIR Date: 20/9/2020 FIR No. 1422/2020

Community:

Scheduled caste (Hindu Paraiyar community)

Ramachandran aka Arasu was a proud and strong man from the Scheduled Caste Paraiyar community. He was a political activist and Vice-President in the local unit of the major political party in Tamil Nadu the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (AIADMK) in Edaikalinadu area of Kancheepuram district of the state. He had several disputes with political rivals including the controversial sale of public land with caste Hindu Ganapathy. Arasu had also fought with local politicians over allotment of government contracts only to members of his rival party the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

Against this backdrop, on 19.09.2020, around 11.45 AM, Arasu left from home on his bike (Bike no. TN19 AZ 1899) to do some work. He had called his brother in the evening, around 6.40PM and said he would be back home soon. But soon after the call he was attacked by a caste Hindu gang led by his political rivals including Ganesan. They were armed with knives and sickles and left Arasu in a pool of blood. A few local Dalits spotted

the attack and shouted for help, but by the time Arasu's brother reached and rushed him to hospital he was dead.

A complaint has been filed against 7 accused Vigneswaran, Marimuthu, and armed forced gang members Deva, Ganesan, Vetrivel, Suresh & Sridhar.

### CURRENT STATUS

A case is booked at Chunambedu police station under section 341, 302 of Indian penal code. The Civil Society Organization also pressurized the officials to file an FIR altered under section 120B, 147, 148, 3(2) (v) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. The Evidence, organisation has contacted the district administration to provide compensation to the affected. Six accused were arrested immediately. On 25.11.2020 the second accused were also arrested. Formal complaint was prepared on behalf of the victim's family members to send it to 9 different officials in relevant departments to expedite the case action.

Image Credit: Wikimedia



### No Freedom from Indignity

Name: Akash Bansode

Age: 29 years old

FIR Date: 12/09/2020

FIR No. 185/2020,

Narkhed Police Station, Nagpur

Community:

Victim belongs to Buddhist community.

The community comes under Scheduled

Caste category

Location: Valandi village in Deoni Block of

Latur District of Maharashtra

Akash, a young labourer, was living with his loving parents and married sister in Valandi village in Deoni Block of Latur district of Maharashtra. His sister Dhammapali Bansode had married Ramdas Nidvanche from the Maratha caste. Her husband had started troubling her since 2016 and often used casteist slurs to insult her. Unable to bear the indignity she somehow found the courage to move out and return to the safety of her parents' house. She took up a job as a nurse in Talegaon, Latur sub centre hospital.

On 12th Sept 2020, Akash walked his sister Dhammapali to the bus stop for her to go to work. As they were waiting for a bus to arrive, Krishan Nidvanche, relative of Ramdas Nidvanche, met them. He started hurling casteist abuses at Akash and Dhammapali without any provocation. The heated argument soon became physical and Krishan took out his belt to beat Akash. The whole village watched as more relatives of Ramdas and Krishan joined in humiliating the brother and sister simply standing at the bus stop. It was

inconceivable to the powerful Maratha community that a girl from a poor Buddhist, Scheduled Caste family had found the courage to take a stand for herself.

### CURRENT STATUS

The police avoided registering the FIR initially. However, with the consistent efforts of the Manuski team and other Dalit Human Rights Defenders including Sunita, Machindra Gawale, Gautam working with Indian Dalit Panthers and Ujagare of Ladha Organisation, the police were compelled to register the FIR. The police have arrested only two accused till date. Very recently (09/10/2020) the victim received a threat call from the accused. Victim has demanded a separate FIR in this regard and civil society organizations are supporting the victim. The other accused also should also be arrested.

Immediate monetary relief to the victim is also a crucial demand.

Image Credits: Wikimedia



# Woman Panchayat President Faces Caste Abuse

Name: Selvi

Age: 33 years old

Occupation: Local Panchayat president

FIR Date: 07/05/2020

FIR No. 1249/2020 Narkhed Police Station, Nagpur

Community:

Selvi belongs to Scheduled caste

(Hindu Kuravan community)

Selvi, a 33-year-old dynamic Dalit woman got elected as a Panchayat President in Goundachipudhur Panchayat in Tirupur District of Tamilnadu. She is a Dalit and a powerful woman, a double whammy which is hard to deal for any prejudiced dominant caste person. So, she was a natural victim of regular derogatory caste remarks from Kuppusamy, a local Ward member from the dominant caste. Focused more on work she chose to ignore these insults in general.

However, on 04.05.2020 at around 05.00 PM, when Selvi was discussing about providing uniform and vitamin tablets to sanitary workers in Panchayat office.

She was rudely interrupted by the local Ward member Kuppusamy who questioned her authority to conduct a meeting without him. She was working under difficult times of the lockdown and did not want to delay completing the meeting. So, she raised her voice and remarked, "You were in the office you could have joined if you wanted!"

Kuppusamy was furious and he reached out to attack her while spurting derogatory caste remarks. This intimidating and humiliating incident happened in front of the other Panchayat Ward members and village people. Selvi finally decided to take legal action. The case is booked at Dharapuram police station with FIR number: 1249/2020, under section 294(b), 506(2), 3(1) (r), 3(1) (s)of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015.

### CURRENT STATUS

The accused has not yet been arrested.
So, the complaint was sent to various state officials including Director General of Police, Chief Secretary, Tirupur District Collector, Tirupur District Superintendent of police and others to speed up the action.
A clear demand is being made for the protection of Scheduled caste panchayat leaders. The accused should be charged also under Goondas act. Proper sustained legal assistance will also be a necessity to get justice and compensation.

Image Credits: Nidhin Shobhna



## Casteist Rants a Way of Life

Name: Shilpa Khandagle (Name changed)

Age: 29 years old

FIR Date: 21/07/2020

FIR No. 315/2020 Marketyard Police Station

Community:

She is from a Scheduled Castes community

known as Matang Caste

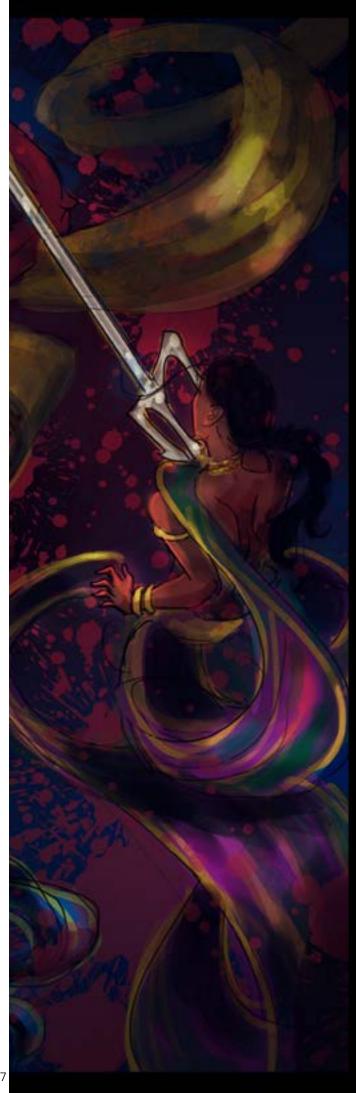
Location: Slum area at Ambedkar Nagar in

Pune City of Maharashtra

Shilpa is a homemaker who lives with her husband Suresh and three children in a slum area at Ambedkar Nagar, in Pune city of Maharashtra. Her small house is located next to Rafique Baba's shop. Every day he finds some excuse for casteist rants. On July 21, 2020 Shilpa could not take it any more so she gently asked him not to abuse anyone by caste names and that it was hurtful. Rafique Baba became aggressive and told her to mind her own business as he had not mentioned her name exclusively. However, just rebuffing was not enough for Rafique Baba. He became more aggressive and started calling her names too and even though people gathered around he impudently held her hand to further intimidate her. Shilpa's husband and relatives rushed to intervene and somehow succeeded in stopping him. Shilpa and everyone in her family went inside the house, however, Rafique continued screaming casteist slurs and threatening to kill Shilpa and her entire family.

### CURRENT STATUS

The FIR was registered after the support was extended by local organisations and Civil Society Organisations, Centre for Development and Social Justice Studies. Major demands include immediate monetary compensation for the victim and charge sheet should be submitted on time.



### Beaten for Running a Grocery Shop

Name: Mafabhai Premabhai Parmar

FIR Date: 25/08/2020 FIR No. 11195018200770

### Community:

The village has 70 Dalit families, 60
Gadhavi (Charan) families, Bhil (STs)
are 30 families, Rabari (Shepherd) 20
families, Patel 30 families, Vaghari
(Devipujak) 3 families and Bawa 1 family

Location: Nanuda village is located in Dhanera Taluka of Gujarat's arid border of district Banaskantha



55-year-old Mafabhai Premabhai Parmar is one of the few Dalits who had managed to run a successful grocery shop in Nanunda village located at Dhanera Taluka in Banaskantha district of Gujarat. His economic stability irked Dungardan Rajuji Gadhvi from the dominant Charan (OBC) community. Dungardan was well known for regularly getting into fights with the Dalits. Most times, no FIR would be lodged against him as there was a fear of backlash from the 'upper' caste community. However, on July 22, 2020 Dungardan again brutally beat up a Dalit man in the village. This time with the support of the local Sangathan, an FIR was filed against Dungardan on the same day. Mafabhai was part of the team that supported the FIR no. 11195018200688. Dungardan somehow managed to use his influence to get bail from Deesa sessions court. He was angry with Mafabhai and was waiting for a chance to take revenge.

On 25th August, 2020 around 1.30 pm, the accused Dungardan, along with 3 unknown persons, came to Mafabhai's shop in a black Bolero. He asked for Harjibhai, who is Mafabhai's oldest son. Mafabhai was concerned so he asked him why he wanted to know the whereabouts of his son and whether he wanted to get some work done by Harjibhai. The upper caste men did not like being questioned and Dungardan used this excuse to take revenge on Mafabhai. The three men got off the Bolero and attacked Mafabhai with a thick stick. He was beaten mercilessly till his hands and leg were fractured.

### CURRENT STATUS

Dhanera based local DHRD Kantibhai Solanki and Ishvar Parmar and the Banaskantha Dalit Sangathan supported the family in filing a complaint in the police station under the IPC sections 325, 323, 294(b), 506(2), 114, SCs & STs PoA sections 3(1)(r), 3(1)(s), 3(2)(va) and GPA 135. Even after filing an FIR the local police indirectly protected the accused by not arresting the accused for 3 months.

Image Credits: Jyoti Singh

### Mentally Challenged Dalit Girl Raped

Name: Rachna (Name changed)

Age: 21 years old

FIR Date: 24/05/2020

FIR No. 7/2020

Community:

Rachna belongs to Scheduled Caste

(Hindu Paraiyar community)

Location: Usilampatti village, Madurai District of Tamil Nadu.

Rachna is a mentally challenged girl who lives in Usilampatti village, Madurai District of Tamil Nadu. She has the support of her loving family that includes her mother Chellammal, father Alagan, younger brother Balamurugan and younger sister Pandeeswari. Her mother was always concerned about Rachna's health so she observed that her menstrual cycle was delayed for the past three months. She took her to the doctor for a physical examination and to her shock found out that Rachna was pregnant. Her parents began a frantic enquiry into the matter. They soon learnt that on 22.02.2020, when they were away from home in Madurai attending a relative's death ceremony, Kodangi Podharaj a caste Hindu Valayar community man living in the same village, took Rachna to a garden and raped her. He even threatened to kill her in case she told anyone about the exploitation.

CURRENT STATUS

The case is booked at Usilampatti all women police station with Cr. No. – 7/2020, under sections 376(2)(k), 506(2), 3(1)(w)(II) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Amendment Act, 2015. Civil society organisation

provided counselling to the victim's parents. Accompanied the family to the police station and hospital for follow-ups. Formal complaint was prepared and sent to various state machineries and commission for speedy action and rehabilitation; even then the accused got bail on 26.7.2020.

There is an urgent need for the Government to provide the victim quality health care. The state should also provide temporary shelter in Social welfare homes till her delivery. Adequate compensation, assistance and protection to the victim are also a necessity.

Image Credits: Alaka Aditi



## Slapped in Public for Requesting Sanitization

Name: Jagdish Hirabhai Parmar

Age: 53 years

Occupation: Factory Worker and Gram Panchayat Member

Date of FIR: 10th May, 2020, FIR No: 11192064200268/2020

Community:

Ambaliyara village has 250 Dalits, 50 Patels, 150 Thakors, 75 Darbar and 100 Bharvads.



Jagdishbhai is a 53-year-old Dalit man who lives with his wife and two sons and his mother in Ambaliyara village, Dholka block of Gujarat. Though the village has a significant Dalit population, they have little control over land assets, or power in the Panchayat. The Patels and the Darbars exert control over the village. Banking on their higher numbers, a few Dalits in the village are finding their voice against injustice. Jagdishbhai is one such vocal advocate of rights.

On 10th May 2020, a person from the locality where Dalits live tested positive for COVID-19. While he was taken to the hospital, the whole village was gripped in fear. The Panchayat immediately set out to sanitize the village. However, they chose to neglect the locality where Dalits lived.

That evening, Jagdishbhai met Sanjay Singh, the husband of the Sarpanch who is from the Darbar community, while others were gathered near the Mahadev temple. Sanjay Singh acts like the proxy Sarpanch as his wife does his bidding. Jagdishbhai requested Singh to ensure sanitization of the area where he lived. Just hearing the request made Sanjay Singh angry.

He rudely retorted that it was not the Panchayat's responsibility to get their area sanitized and that they should make their own arrangements. This led to a heated exchange of words which resulted in Sanjay threatening Jagdishbhai and slapping him in front of everyone. They were somehow separated by the others present there. A furious Jagdishbhai went to the police station and filed a complaint about the incident.

### CURRENT STATUS

As soon as DHRDNet got to know about the incident, they spoke to Jagdishbhai, and visited the site of the incident to get all the details. Checking details of the FIR and police investigation, DHRDNet provided Jagdishbhai all necessary legal guidance. A meeting with the Deputy Superintendent of Police was arranged to discuss the case and facilitate the arrest of the accused. Sanjay Singh meanwhile has applied for bail in the High Court.

Image Credit: The Hindu

## Reckless Driving Cannot be Questioned

Name: Ranjith Kumar, Muthu Kumar and

Loganathan

Age: 53 years

Location: Naduvasal, Keelaayur post, Ilayangudi village, Sivagangai District of

Tamilnadu

Date of FIR: 21/05/2020

FIR No: 233/2020

Community: Ranjith Kumar belongs to Scheduled Caste (Hindu Pallar community)

A group of dominant caste youth were reprimanded by the village elders in the llayangudi village, for driving two wheelers in high speed on the streets of a colony where Dalits lived. The group of boys were peeved with the Dalits and decided to retaliate. On 21 May 2020 around 3.30 PM, when RanjithKumar, Muthkumar, Loganathan were purchasing goods in the street shop, the group of dominant caste men Prasanth, Pandiyaraj, Arumugam, Subash, Ajith, Sibiraj, Hariharan, Manikandan, Muralitharan, Sathaiya, Pandi came charging at them with swords and knife. They hurled casteist abuses and shouted, "You pariah bitch boys, how dare you come to our village?" The three Dalit boys tried escaping but they were brutally attacked and severely injured with cuts in hands, spine, and neck. The victims screamed for help and a few men from the Dalit colony rushed the victims to a nearby Government hospital.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case has been booked at Elayankudi Police Station under sections 147, 148, 294(b), 324, 326, 307, 3(1) (x), 3(2)(v) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Amendment Act, 2015. Civil society organisation supported the victims and prepared formal complaint on behalf of the affected. The survivors and activists' demands include speedy legal action, compensation, assistance and protection to the victims.

Image Credit: Cassie Matias on Unsplash



### Murdered for Declining Work

Name: Sureshbhai Haribhai Rathod

Date of FIR: 20.11. 2020 FIR No: 11198007200499

### Community:

Matalpur village has 200 Koli families who are the dominant caste. There are around 100 Dalits, Khasia Darbar 14 families, 4 Barber families and 2 Bharvad families in the village

Location: Matalpar village is located at Mahuva taluka in Bhavnagar district of Gujarat



22-year-old Suresh Haribhai Rathod was the youngest son of Haribhai Kalubhai Rathod. He lived with his widower father, elder brother, his wife and son. The underprivileged family survived by doing agricultural labour and informal labour work. Sureshbhai worked as a driver for Nika Koli to augment the family's income. His working hours were gruelling and often at the end of the day he wanted to just get home and crash.

On one such day, when he was really tired and returning home, he met Mukesh Manu Bhaliya who asked him to do labour work on his farm. Sureshbhai knew Mukesh and his friends Himmat Jodha Chudasama and Gobar Nagji Bhaliya. The young boys would sometimes hang out and share a few moments of fun. So, when Mukesh asked him to do farm work, Sureshbhai felt comfortable enough to decline the job as he was not up for doing more work. Little did he know that even amongst familiar people, you do not have a right to decline anything the dominant class demands if you are a Dalit.

After a week the three friends again met Sureshbhai on 19th November 2020 at around 6 pm along with two other boys. The five men stopped Sureshbhai and started interrogating him. They demanded an explanation for refusing to work on Mukeshbhai's farm. Sureshbhai was offended by this gang enquiry and got into an argument. The verbal abuse soon turned into a physical one. They stabbed Sureshbhai viciously in his abdomen and left him bleeding profusely. Around 7.30 pm Devabhai Chudasama found him and informed the family over phone. Haribhai rushed with his elder son Vinodbhai and called the ambulance to take him to the Government hospital at Bagdana for treatment. However, Sureshbhai's wounds were deep and he died during treatment.

### CURRENT STATUS

Local DHRD Arvind Makwana and Niruben Chorasiya rushed to Bagdana Government Hospital the moment they heard about the incident. They supported Haribhai in filing an FIR and made a clear demand that the family would not accept the body till police arrested the accused. This compelled the police to take immediate action and arrest the three main accused. The complaint was filed on 20th November in Bagdana police station under IPC-302, 147, 148, 364, 120(B), GPA 135 and PoA Act - 3(2)(v). The dominant Koli community is angry with the arrests and they have filed a counter complaint and are also trying to put political pressure to intimidate Haribhai's family.

Image Credits: Sunil Awchar

### Abused for Resisting Power Theft

Name: Shanti H. (Name Changed)

Age: 27 years old

Occupation: Constable in Maharashtra

state police

Date of Incident: 17/10/2020

FIR Date: 18/10/2020

FIR No. 814/2020 Satara City Police Station

Community:

She belongs to the Holar caste which is considered a separate caste in the

scheduled caste category now



Shanthi is a single parent to a three-yearold son. She had to leave her husband as his dominant caste family refused to accept her. His family continues to trouble her even after six years of marriage. She joined the police force in 2017 and moved out of Thane to Vishal Residency, a housing society in Satara city in January 2020. Change of location was a dream towards a dignified life, free from casteist insults. However, when she started staying, she observed that the water supply of the whole wing in the building was through a motor affixed at the ground floor, which to her horror, was drawing its electric supply from her electric meter. She brought it to the notice of the flat owner who was utilizing this facility. They ignored her request and she had to approach the self-proclaimed Secretary of the society to resolve the issue. However, her complaints were repeatedly ignored. Finally, she went to launch a complaint, but Satara city police station registered her complaint as a non-cognizable offence and did not file an FIR.

The accused Kive family wanted to counter file a complaint to unnerve Shanthi. The police heard both parties and instead decided Kive family would have to pay Rs 200 per month to Shanthi as expense for using electricity. The Kive family agreed in front of the police but later refused to pay a single penny. When Shanthi pursued the matter, the accused abused her with casteist slurs, kicked her utensils and tried to beat her. Enraged, Shanthi went again to the police station to file an FIR.

### CURRENT STATUS

The FIR was finally registered the next day of the incident on Oct 18, 2020. The victim realized the situation was not going to be easily resolved. So, she approached the civil society organisations for support. The organizations are providing Shanthi all necessary legal advice. They are demanding the immediate arrest of the accused, monetary relief to the victim and addition of relevant sections to the FIR.

Image Credits: Rajyashri Goody

# Dalits Denied Entry to Common Way

Name: Rajaveni

Age: 37 years old

Occupation: Daily wage earner

FIR Date: 07/05/2020

FIR No. 622/2020

Community:

Rajaveni belongs to Scheduled Caste

(Adi Dravidar community)

Rajaveni and her husband Jeyachandran worked as daily wage earners for their livelihood. Their tough life was further worsened when three people in their slum area were suspected to be affected by COVID-19. Even before their test results were confirmed their entire slum in Tiruvennainallur Taluk, Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu was engulfed in fear. The dominant caste people in the village blocked the common way with thorns. If by mistake anyone from the slum area went that way, they were driven away by the people in the village.

On 7 May 2020, Balaji from the slum area was driving his two-wheeler in the common way to reach his destination quickly. A group of 22 members from the dominant caste seized Balaji's two-wheeler and abused him, "Son of Pariah bitch, you, came this way to spread the disease?" Hearing about the incident the slum residents decided to approach the dominant caste group to request them to return the scooter and enquire for how long they would be deprived of using the common way.

They were received by a group of dominant caste members who started attacking the slum people with swords, iron rods and abused them by screaming, "Pariah dogs, you're not permitted this way." This intimidation was not enough so they went on to burn three two-wheelers and badly damaged one two-wheeler of

the slum residents. Several members from the slum locality were severely injured. Rajaveni, came forward to support the victims to file an FIR.

A case was booked at Tiruvennainallur police station with FIR no: 622/2020, under section 147, 148, 294(b), 323, 324, 506(2), 307, 3(1), 3(1)(r), 3(1)(s), 3(2)(va), 3(2)(v)of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case is under police investigation and charge sheet is yet to be filed. The two main accused were arrested but they have already applied for bail. Proper police investigation needs to be carried out and charge sheet should be filed within 60 days. The victims should receive appropriate compensation, assistance and protection.

Image Credits: Wikimedia



### Belligerence of a Sexual Abuser

Name: Rupali (Name changed)

Age: 23 years old

Education: Student of MSc first year

Date of FIR: 25.05.2020, FIR No: 0248,

Bramhapuri Police Station, Chandrapur

### Community

Rupali, the victim is from the NauBouddha (Mahar) community (Scheduled Caste) and the accused Kakaji Yashwant Pradhan is from the dominant caste Kunabi (OBC).

Location: Nanhori Village located in Brahapuri Taluk of Chandrapur District of Maharashtra.

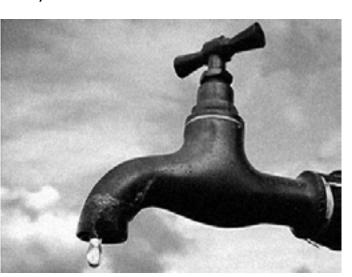
Rupali's cousin sister works at Dreams
Cross Toys Company in Pune city of
Maharashtra. She enjoyed visiting her
cousin in the city as Rupali's family resides
in Nanhori village located in Brahmapuri
taluk of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra.
However, when it was time to return home,
she got stuck in Pune as the country declared
an emergency lockdown due to the pandemic. In the month of May 2020, she

finally decided to return home.
She and her cousin both took permission and travelled back to Nanhori village in Chandrapur.
The moment they returned to their village they were

placed in a Quarantine Centre in Zilla Parishad school for 14 days.

While living in the school, on 24th May 2020 at around 7.30pm Rupali stepped out to freshen up at the common water tap inside the school. She was washing her hands and legs when suddenly she was overpowered by Kakaji Yashwant Pradhan who sneaked up unknowingly by jumping the compound wall of the school. He held her right hand in a tight grip and pulled her aside to sexually abuse her. She fought back and screamed for help. Her cousin sister and other people in the quarantine center rushed to help her. However, Ka-

kaji was totally unashamed. He spurted casteist slurs and left the place. Rupali was inconsolable and when her cousin brother came to know about the incident, he visited Kakaji's house to confront him. He was received by a belligerent Kakaji who threw a steel glass at him which injured his forehead.



CURRENT STATUS

The survivor has managed to register an FIR with the help of Dalit Human Right Defenders Network. They managed to lodge an FIR the next day on 25th May 2020 at Brahmapur Police station which

is 12km from the villages. The case is under trial but the accused has been released on bail. The survivor needs protection and urgent counselling support to deal with the trauma. Sustained legal guidance will also be necessary for getting justice in a case like this.

Image Credit: News Nation

## Visiting a Barber Not a Right for Dalits

Name: Kirankumar Hansabhai Khambhu

Date of FIR: 03.07. 2020

FIR No: 11195018200604/2020

### Community:

Dugdol Moti village is dominated by the Patels (452 families) and the Koli communities who are the major land owners in the area. 310 Dalit families, 294 Thakor families, 155 Rabari (shepherd) community and 20 Nai (Barber) families.

Location: Dugdol Moti village is located in Dhanera Taluka of Gujarat's arid border district Banaskantha



Kirankumar is the sole breadwinner of the family that included his widower father, sister, and unemployed brothers who had come back from various cities as factories were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They live in Dugdol Moti village, located in Dhanera Taluka of Gujarat's arid border district Banaskantha. The area is notorious for horrific cases of violence against Dalits. The area also has a strong practice of untouchability in public places.

With a respectable job in a private printing press, and by getting along with most people in his village, 26-year-old Kirankumar thought he had earned a respectable place in society. His perception was shattered when he tried getting his beard shaved at a barber's shop located in a public place at Moti Dugdol bus-stand. On 3rd July, 2020 when Kiran visited Alpesh Mafabhai Nai's shop, the barber simply refused to shave his beard. Kiran was taken aback as he was familiar with Alpesh Bhai and did not expect discriminatory behaviour from him. So, when Kiran insisted. Alpesh insolently remarked, "Why have you come for shaving when you very well

know that non-Dalits do not allow Dalits to get their haircuts or shaves in our shops." An annoyed Kiran felt the need to assert his legitimate right to access any of these services anywhere in the village. As he argued, two more barbers Ashok Pratap Nai and Arvind Magan Nai joined Alpesh bhai. They decided to put Kiran in his place so they beat him up badly and threw him out of the shop. The mortifying experience prompted Kiran to raise his voice against this inequality.

### CURRENT STATUS

Dhanera-based local community-led organization Banaskantha Dalit Sangathan (BDS) supported the victim's family, and bolstered their confidence to help them file a police complaint at the Dhanera Police Station. After the filing of FIR, the three accused Alpesh Mafabhai, Ashok Pratap and Arvind Magan were arrested. However, the struggle for equality and eventual conviction for the accused will be long-drawn process that requires sustained effort.

Image Credits: Wikimedia

### Murdered due to Antagonism

Name: Nadarajan

Age: 55 years old

Occupation: Watchman

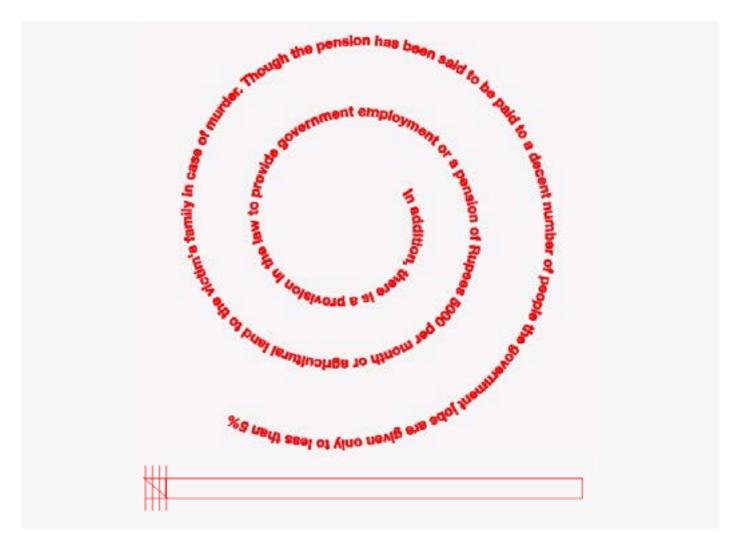
FIR Date: 26/04/2020

FIR No. 263/2020

Community:

Nadarajan belongs to Scheduled caste (Hin-

du Paraiyar community)



On 26.04.2020 at around 06.00 AM, 55-year-old Nadarajan's family received information that he was brutally murdered with grievous cuts and injuries on left knee, below chin, neck, right ear, and head. Baffled by the news Nadarajan's family including his wife Saraswathi, son Raja, daughter-in- law Sivasakthi, and grandchildren tried to find out the reasons for the gruesome attack.

Nadarajan was a 55-year-old Scheduled Caste man who lived with his family in Rajiv Gandhinagar, Kadavacherry, Ammapettai post, Chidambaram Taluk, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu. He worked as a watchman in a complex for nearly 10 years. His son Raja was recently elected as a Ward member in the local elections. The family suspects Nadarajan was murdered due to some antagonism. However, they are not sure who could have committed the crime. The police are yet to trace the criminals.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case was booked at Annamalai Nagar police station under section 302, FIR No: 263/2020. The family have sought assistance from Social Awareness Society for Youths (SASY), a local NGO to demand CBCID enquiry for speedy justice. They also need support in making regular follow-ups on the case with local police officials

Image Credits: Yogesh Barve

## Threatened for having 'Singh' Surname

Name: Mansinghbhai Premjibhai Jadhav

Date of FIR: 29.10. 2020

FIR No: 111860020060/2020

### Community:

Madhana village has 250 families of Karadiya Rajput; 70 families of Dalits; 50 families of Koli Patel and 50 families of other communities

Location: Madhana village in Sutrapada block of Gir-Somnath district in the State of Gujarat

On the night of 26th October 2020,
Mansinghbhai was at home chatting
with his family which includes his wife and
two sons. His son Ranveersingh told him
that Nilesh Nathabhai, from the powerful
Darbar community, had called him to
warn him that he must remove the word
'Singh' from his Facebook profile name.
He even threatened him that if he did not
remove it, he would come to his house to
ensure it is done.

Mansinghbhai is a retired army personnel and his older son is also well-employed. They were concerned about the threat but thought it might be just a oneoff incident. However, when they were repairing their vehicle, Nilesh Nathabhai came outside their house and called out for Ranveersingh. He again warned him to remove the word 'Singh' after his name. A peeved Ranveer told him it was ridiculous to expect him to change his name when all his certificates had this name and that he should just go home. An insolent Nilesh said that he would make sure that it was not only removed from the certificates but also from the world itself. Just as things were getting heated up, Bhikhabhai, another villager was passing by in the area. He convinced Nilesh to go back home. Nilesh left but not before spurting casteist abuses and saying that the road did not belong to their ancestors.

The obnoxious and persistent threats made the family worried enough to hire a lawyer to file a complaint in the Sutrapada police station.

### CURRENT STATUS

Piyushbhai of DHRD network has extended all legal help and guidance to Mansinghbhai. However, the accused Nileshbhai has also filed an application of objections and has been granted bail from the sessions court. To celebrate his release, a group of 25 people came on motorcycles shouting the slogan "Jai Bhavani" in front of Mansinghbhai's house.

Image Credits: Nidhin Shobhna



### Burnt for Pleading Better Pay

Name: Jeyakumar

Occupation: Lorry Driver and tractor

driver

Date of FIR: 29/05/2020

FIR No: 372/2020

Community:

Jeyakumar belongs to Scheduled

Caste community.

Jeyakumar is a 49-year-old lorry and tractor driver who lives with his wife and three daughters in Kalakkad Village, Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. He constantly tries to augment the family's income by doing whatever jobs he can find. On 28.05.2020, Jeyakumar worked in the garden of Edward who belongs to the Christian Nadar community. Edward is not a good pay master and Jeyakumar continued to work as he feared losing his job. After a gruelling day of hard work at around 06.30 PM a frustrated Jeyakumar was returning home. He met a group of men Muthuvel, Kalimuthu, Rathinaraj and Senivasanarayanan from the Hindu Nadar community.

They were sitting under a tree consuming alcohol. These men were close to Edward so Jeyakumar thought if he shared his hardship, they might tell Edward to give enough pay for work.

However, when he shared with the four men, instead of being compassionate, they abused Jeyakumar with cuss words, and flippantly asked him, "Why are you complaining to us, you should directly complain to Edward." A disappointed Jeyakumar gently responded, "You guys are close to him so I was hoping if you speak to him, he might help me with better payment."

The four Nadar dominant community men were enraged by a Dalit's ability to question. Within seconds a conversation turned into a violent attack. They decided to teach him a lesson. The four men poured alcohol on Jeyakumar and set his clothes on fire. Seeing Jeyakumar screaming Mahalingam, another man from that village came rushing to rescue him. But by the time the fire was doused Jeyakumar had severe burn injuries. The four men continued threatening to kill Jeyakumar as they moved from that spot.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case is booked at Kalakkad police station with FIR no. 372/2020 under sections 294(b), 324, 307,3(1)(r), 3(2)(v) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Amendment Act, 2015.

The victim should be provided proper treatment for burn injuries and should get adequate compensation, assistance and protection.

Image Credits: Wikimedia



## Blackmailed with Video of Forced Sex

Name: Ritika (Name changed)

Age: 15 years old

Date of FIR: 10th November, 2020, FIR No: 10203055600321/2020

### Community:

Shil village has around 1385 families including Koli's, Ahirs, Bharwads, Patels and a fairly large number of Dalits as well.

Location: Shil village is located in Mangrol Taluka at Gujarat's coastal area of Junagadh district.

Ritika is a 15-year-old dalit girl who lives with her parents who do fishing and daily wage labour in Shil village located on Gujarat's coastal area of Junagadh district. Making two ends meet is a big challenge for her parents who have six daughters. Ritika studies in a government school. She fell in love with Kuldip Bharda, a grown-up man who had been seeing her for the last 6 months. On 13th October, 2020 at around 10 pm Kuldip went to her house and called her over phone. He enticed her to come down to meet him near her house. When she came down to meet, he walked her to a dark alley and tried to demand sex but she refused vehemently. When he realised, she was not going to give in easily, he forcibly began to have sex with her. Kuldip's friend Pritesh Jagdish Daki of Divasa village shot a video of the act of rape clandestinely. Both friends then used the video to force her to have sex with Pritesh as well. They threatened her that if she did not cooperate, they would release the video online and make it go viral.

After the horrific incident, Ritika somehow crawled back home. She was terrified and even though she was in pain and losing blood profusely, she kept silent through the night. The next day when the pain

was unbearable, at around 5 am she broke down and shared with her parents the whole terrifying incident. The parents could not dare to file a complaint as they were immediately threatened by the accused. The Koli community of Shil village and even some local politicians pressurized them against taking any legal action.

### CURRENT STATUS

The victim's family finally got support when Prakashbhai of Saurashtra Dalit Sangathan (SDS) heard of the case. He immediately informed Babubhai Chauhan, a leading activist with SDS. This community-based organization has been working for the last three decades on Dalit human rights. They provided emotional and legal support to the family.

After that the family registered a complaint on 10th November, 2020 in Shil Police station. The police have arrested the accused under IPC-376(2)(J), 376(3), 354(A)(B), 114, POCSO act – 4,8,17 and PoA Act – 3(1)r, s, w, 3(2)(5). However, the battle for justice and eventual conviction for the accused will be a long-drawn process that requires sustained effort and constant monitoring of the case.

Image Credits: Kanishka Zico

## Advocate Assaulted by Police

Name: Eswaran

Age: 37 years old

Occupation: Advocate

FIR: Filed a private complaint (Writ petition) in High Court. The case needs to be filed under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015.

Location: Bharathiar University campus in Coimbatore city of Tamilnadu

Community:

Eswaran belongs to Dalit community (Parayar caste )

Eswaran, 37-year-old advocate from the Parayar community, resides with his parents and siblings in Bharathiar University campus in Coimbatore city of Tamil Nadu. On 7 May 2020, at around 9 PM he and his colleagues were sitting and having dinner in the outdoor space in front of their home to maintain social distancing. Manivannan, a Police Inspector from Vadavalli police station came with another police officer to Eswaran's house. He began to interrogate them by asking them why they had gathered at his residence. Advocate Eswaran told him they were lawyers discussing their cases. The aggressive offensive tone of the police soon led to a dispute as the lawyers did not like being interrogated without any legitimate reason. They argued and Manivannan wielded his lathi without any provocation and started charging Eswaran. He broke his left hand in a brutal assault. Advocate Eswaran filed a complaint to the Superintendent of Police to seek justice.

CURRENT STATUS

The accused has not yet been arrested.
Eswaran realized seeking justice is going to be a long-drawn battle so he has taken the support of Evidence, a local organization which has extensive experience in working towards the effective implementation of laws and policies to protect and promote Dalit and Tribal rights. Evidence has provided

legal assistance and given guidance to file a private complaint (Writ petition) in High court. The case needs to be filed under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015 against the police officials. There is also a need to initiate departmental action against the police officials. Advocate Eswaran should be provided compensation.

Image Credits: Gujarat Exclusive



## Custodial Death of Dalit Minor

Name: Ritik Arvindbhai Parmar

Age: 17 years old

FIR Details: Police will file an FIR only after the Government appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) will complete its fact-finding report on the Child Protection Home

Community:

Victim is from Scheduled Caste

Location: Ingoli village, Dholka Taluka of Gujarat

In yet another horrific custodial death case, 17-year-old Ritik died in police custody at Isanpur in Ahmedabad on the 27th of October. The ordeal for the Parmar's, a Scheduled Caste family, started on the 21st of October when Ritik got into an altercation with some local upper caste boys about alcohol in the area.

One of the boys, Jayant Marwadi, had filed a police complaint and Ritik was called to the police station. He went with his mother to give his statement and after recording it the police took custody of Ritik and sent him to a Juvenile home. Here, Ritik's health started deteriorating and despite repeated requests his parents were not allowed to meet him. It is likely that he was tortured at the juvenile home and that led to severe physical distress.

His parents were denied permission to meet him on the 23rd and the next few days. On the 27th they rushed to the juvenile home after they were informed that his health had deteriorated. When they reached, Ritik was brought out in a wheelchair. A frail, weak, beaten Ritik caught a last glimpse of his parents and died right in front of them.

It was clear to the parents that Ritik was a victim of torture and they refused to

accept the body till their demands for a thorough probe into the case was initiated. They protested for three days with Dalit groups and community voices before their demand was accepted and Ritik's body was cremated.

### CURRENT STATUS

The lead in this case was taken by
Ahmedabad-based organizations, which
provided social and legal assistance to
the family. They helped protests and
demands for a complaint to be registered
against the police before the body of the
victim was accepted by the family and a
panel of doctors did a post mortem.

A Special Investigating Team is probing the matter to ensure that police do not tamper with the evidence and once the investigation is completed, DHRD network organisations are following up to ensure that action is taken against juvenile remand home officials and the police personnel. There is an urgent need for compensation to be paid to the family of the victim and registration of the case under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

Image Credits: Wikimedia



## Can't Stand Dalit Supplying Water

Name: Sekar

Age: 61 years old

FIR: 01/09/2020 FIR No: 773/2020

Community:

Sekar belongs to Scheduled caste

(Hindu Paraiyar community)

Sekar lives with his wife Valarmathi, son Kalaivananprabhu, daughter-in-law Agalya, and granddaughter Ranjitha in Vairavapuram village, Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. Sekar's wife Valarmathi is employed as an Overhead Tank Operator in Sangarapuram from 2009. She is responsible for supplying water to the entire locality. On 30.08.2020, at around 9.00 AM, Caste Hindu

and Sangarapuram VicePresident, Kundupandi
Pandiyarajan contacted
Sekar through phone and
asked his wife and him to
come to Sangarapuram
Panchayat office. Since,
Valarmathiwas not well,
Sekar went alone to
Sangarapuram panchayat
office. When Sekar reached
there he saw Kundupandi
Pandiyarajan, Ganesan,
Ranjithkumar and Karthick,
all Caste Hindu men

waiting for him. "What did you all want to talk to Valarmathi and me," he enquired. The response to this harmless question came in the form of casteist abuses. They tauntingly spoke to him, "Hey, Parai dog of a bitch, your wife is not giving proper water supply"? Sekar was humiliated with the derogatory manner of speaking so he gently asked them to treat him with respect. To which Ganesan said, "What respect is needed for

Parai dog?" As Sekar began to leave, Kundupandi Pandiyarajan threatened Sekar with dire consequences in case Valarmathi did not resign from her permanent job position.

### CURRENT STATUS

A case is booked at Karaikudi North police station with FIR no. 773/2020, under section 294(b), 323, 506(2), 3(1)(s) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015.

Evidence, an NGO sought the support of local movements and political parties. They staged public demonstration and helped in following the legal proceedings. Formal complaint has also been sent on behalf of the victim to 9 officials and commissions to speed-up the process of justice. The 4 accused were released on bail on 25/10/2020/ and 11/11/2020



respectively.

Image Credits: Malvika Raj

## Mob attack on a Widow's Family

Name: Valiben Shankarbhai Parmar (Widow)

Date of FIR: 25.10. 2020

FIR No: 11195050200962/2020

Community:

Taruwa village has 150 Thakore families and around 20 Scheduled Caste families.

There are a few Patel caste families too

Location: Taruwa village is located in Lakhani taluka of Banaskantha district of Gujarat

Valiben Shankarbhai Parmar is a 50-yearold widow who lives with her 5 children, including 3 sons and 2 daughters. After her husband died, she worked very hard to support her family. She has faced many social hurdles of being a widow to provide for her disadvantaged family. The family has a little a small piece of agricultural land and all of them work hard to cultivate the farm. Pathubhai is her eldest son who fell in love with a Thakor's girlfriend. They knew that they could not get married in the village so they fled with the intention of getting married in a safer place. When the Dalits came to know, thinking it was dangerous for the entire community, they found the girl and handed her over to Thakore.

Meanwhile, Thakore whose pride was hurt, decided to give a more befitting response to the family. He launched a mob attack on Valiben's family on 20th October 2020. More than 20 Palavi Thakor community men landed at Pathubhai's brother Bhurabhai's house who lived next to Valiben. They vandalized the entire house and destroyed all the crockery and furniture, before setting the whole house

on fire. They beat the family members mercilessly with sticks and sharp weapons. Listening to Bhurabhai and his family's screams, Valiben and her son Kiranbhai, along with daughter Dhefiben, ran to save them. The mob attacked them as well and set fire to their house too, after breaking all the items in the house. The whole destruction lasted for an hour from 7 pm to 8 pm. When the hooligans left, neighbours rushed the family to the Government hospital at Lakhani. Bhurabhai's had multiple fractures in his legs and hands so he had to be rushed to the district hospital in Palanpur. Intensive treatment was required to stabilize him.

### CURRENT STATUS

Local DHRD Nanjibhai Hadiyal, Shantilal Rathod and Banaskantha Dalit Sangathan team supported the family in filing an FIR. The complaint was registered on 25th October, 2020 at Tharad police station with IPC sections 307, 325 323, 435, 436, 427, 452, 147, 148, 149,120B, PoA Act Section 3(2) (v), 3(2)(va) and GPA 135. They even mobilized the Dalit community to demand for justice.

Image Credits: Priyanka Paul



### Sexual Assault of a 16-Year-Old

Name: Ponkaliammal

Age: 16 years old

FIR No.: 13/2020

Community:

Ponkaliammal belongs to Scheduled caste (Hindu Paraiyar community)

Location: Mamarathupatti Village, Usilampatti Taluk, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.

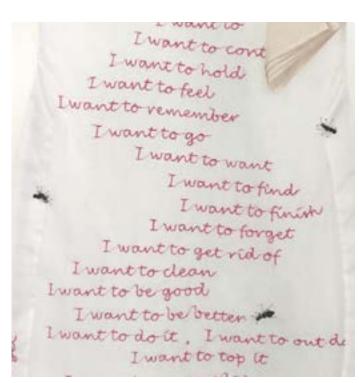
Ponkaliammal is a 16-year-old young girl who lives with her father Selvam, mother Seeniyammal and older sister Thangamalar. The disadvantaged Paraiyar community family does not have any sanitation facilities and they have to resort to open defecation for natures call. Two months ago, Ponkaliammal went to defecate in the open field. At that time, Babu, a dominant caste man followed her silently. He caught her unawares and gagged her mouth to stifle her screams. He then dragged her to a thorny bush area where he abused her sexually while abusing her with casteist remarks. As he left her, he warned her not to reveal the incident to anyone. He even threatened killing Ponkaliammal and her whole family. The young girl suffered the agony of the cruel assault silently.

Babu would find every opportunity to repeat his threats to Ponkaliammal. On 31.08.2020 when Ponkaliammal went to defecate in the open field again, Babu found her and began intimidating her again. He did not notice three young boys Sathish, Pandiyarajan, and Muthukamatchi of the Paraiyar community passing through that area. They overheard Babu's cold threats. So, they shouted at him. Babu escaped but not before giving another vicious threat to kill Ponkaliammal's family. The boys escorted the shattered Ponkaliammal back home and told her mother about the incident. Her parents then filed a complaint against Babu.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case is booked at Usilampatti in an All-Women Police Station with FIR no. 13/2020, under sections 5(1), 6, 506(1), 3(1) (w) (ii), 3(1)(r), 3(1)(s) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. Formal complaint was sent to 10 different officers to expedite the action. The accused was arrested on 11.9.2020. The accused got bail on 10.11.2020. All the necessary supportive documents were collected to initiate legal proceedings and pressurize the police to file an FIR immediately. Contacted the officials to provide medical memo and ensured it was registered as a medical legal case. The victim was accompanied to the Usilampatti taluk government hospital for medical investigation. The local DHRD provided emotional counselling to the victim and family members.

Image Credits: Saviya Lopes



# Attacked for Countering False Allegation

Name: Sureshbhai Mavjibhai Makwana

Age: 42 years old

Date of FIR: 04/05/2020, FIR No: 11192064200256/2020

### Community:

There are 100 Dalit families in the village; 120 families of Darbar; 80 families of Bharwad, 15 families of Koli Patel; 15 families of Nayaka; 20 Adivasi families and 20 families of other communities

Location: Village: Vautha; Block: Dholka; District: Ahmedabad; State: Gujarat

The sudden lockdown due to the pandemic emergency left millions in the country dependent on relief kits to survive. Suresh Bhai's impoverished family was also eagerly awaiting



survive. He is a 42-year-old rickshaw driver who lives in Vautha village in Dholka block of Gujarat, He lives with his parents, wife, one daughter; brother and his wife and their two children.

On 4th May 2020 when the relief kits were being distributed near the Gram Panchayat office of Vautha village, Suresh Bhai was eagerly waiting for his turn to receive the relief materials. Suddenly, 27-year-old Bhagirath Mandora from the powerful Darbar community made a loud accusation on Dalits for taking 15 extra relief kits. Suresh Bhai did not appreciate the false allegation so he asked for the list of kits distributed. He assured everyone that if at all it had happened, he would ensure those kits were returned. Bhagirath found the suggestion offensive and immediately attacked Sureshbhai. Somehow the people around stopped the physical assault but the repeated threats and rude behaviour of the accused compelled Suresh Bhai to file an atrocity case against him.

Vautha village has been dominated by the Darbar community for years. The Dalits are dependent on them and the Darbars control the land. panchayat and other resources in the village. However, Dalits have learnt to stand up for

their rights and entitlements in this village. Community-based organizations have been working for years in this village, creating awareness, building leadership among Dalits and also encouraging education amongst the youth to empower them. So, Dalits no longer tolerate the oppression of the Darbars. Suresh Bhai's response and his challenge to the allegation hurt the ego of the Darbars and that was the root cause for the ugly fight.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

DHRD has given all legal help and guidance to the survivor of the case and has also discussed the case with the High Court lawyer. The accused has been granted bail by the high court. An impartial thorough investigation is required in this case because the atrocity sections were cancelled by the police.

Image Credit: Priyanka Paul

# Woman Panchayat President Denied Her Chair

Name: Priya Periyasamy

Age: 23 years old

Occupation: Panchayat President

Date of FIR: 12/10/2020 FIR No: 1425/2020

Community:

Priyaperiyasamy belongs to Scheduled caste (Adi Dravidar Community)

Priyaperiyasamy, is a young dynamic Scheduled Caste woman who lives with her husband in Mayiladuthura town in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu. She was nominated in panchayat elections and got elected as Panchayat President in Manampanthal taluk, Nagapattinam District. Amala Rajagopal from the dominant caste Hindu Vanniyar community was elected as the Vice-President in the same elections.

Victory of a Scheduled Caste woman was irking the upper castes terribly.
On 05.10.2020, this antagonism came out publicly when Amala questioned her authority directly in a meeting. Just as Priyaperiyasamy was going to occupy the President Chair, Amala unable to contain her resentment rudely remarked, "How could we come to Panchayat office, if you Parai dog sit in the President Chair!"

Priyaperiyasamy decided not to ignore this humiliating incident. She filed a formal complaint to the Regional development officer, Mayiladuthurai on 6.10.2020.

However, no action was taken. As a disappointed Priyaperiyasamy tried to resume her work in the Panchayat office, she was again humiliated by Amala Rajagopal and her husband with casteist abuses.

### CURRENT STATUS

A case has been booked at Mayiladuthurai police station with FIR no. 1425/2020 (dated 12.10.2020) under section 294(b), 506(1), 3(1)(s), 3(2)(v) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. Civil Society Organizations have made public demonstrations to protest this unfair humiliating undermining of an elected President's authority on the basis of her caste. The accused are yet to be arrested. The local DHRDs/Advocates had accompanied to meet the District officials/Superintendent of police to expedite the case and take necessary action.

Image Credit: Nidhin Shobhna



# Abused for the Lamb crossing land

Name: Loganathan

Age: 25 years old

Occupation: Labourer

Date of FIR: 15/05/2020 FIR No: 1121/2020

Community:

Loganathan belongs to Scheduled Caste (Hindu Arunthathiyar community)

Loganathan is a 25-year-old young man who belongs to the Scheduled Caste Arunthathiyar community. He works as a labourer and lives with his parents and sister Malathi in Devampalayam village, Tirupur District of Tamil Nadu. The family augments their income through animal grazing as well. On 07.05.2020, Loganathan's lamb wandered into Prayeen's land who is a dominant caste man from the Goundar Community. Praveen discovered the lamb stuck in the barbed wire of his property. He started beating the animal mercilessly. Longanathan and his sister Malathi heard this and came running to free the animal. They pleaded, "Unknowingly, our lamb entered your land, we will make sure this will not happen again." Praveen was unaffected by their pleas and he just held the neck of the lamb and went into his garden without answering anything. There Praveen was joined by his mother Rathinammal, and his grandmother who both refused to give the lamb back. They even abused Longanathan and Malathi with their caste name telling them, "You Sakkilyas, have become so bold as to come to our garden to ask for your lamb!" Malathi and Loganathan finally gave

up and told them to keep the lamb with themselves and returned home. On the next day (08.05.2020), Loganathan's family was called by the local panchayat. It was a Kangaroo court (Caste panchayat) which was organized in the name of the village meeting. So, it was dominated by 30 Upper caste men. They asked Loganathan's family to apologize to Praveen's family in front of the whole gathering. When Loganathan refused to apologize, the gathering asked Loganathan's family to leave the village.

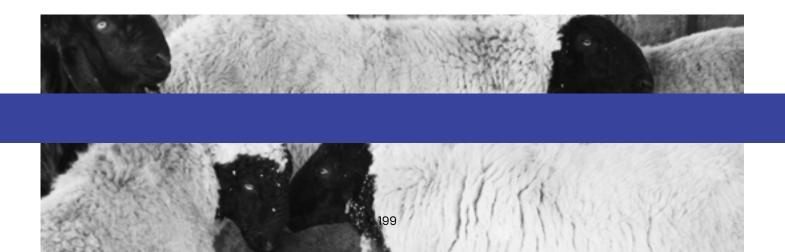
### CURRENT STATUS

The case is booked at Avinashi police station with FIR no. 1121/2020, under section 294(b), 323, 506(1), 3(1)(r), 3(1)(s),3(2)(va) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities)

Amendment Act, 2015. The local Arunthathiyar movement has provided support to the victim to follow-up the case in the court.

Police has to take proper legal procedure in arresting the accused and filing charge sheet within 60 days of the incident.

Image Credit: Nidhin Shobhna



# Crime of Drinking Water from Common Pipe

Name: Rukmani and 9 other Dalits

Location: Malaipatti Village of Karur District in Tamilnadu

Date of FIR: 19/05/2020 FIR No: 289/2020

Community:

Rukmani belongs to Scheduled
Caste (Arunthathiyar community)

Rukmani is a 29-year-old daily wage earner from the Arunthathiyar community who lives with her husband and children in Malaipatti Village of Karur District in Tamilnadu. The village has 40 Dalit families and 370 non-Dalit families living there. The caste divide is stark in daily existence. However, on 18th May 2020 the caste hate took an ugly twist when a small boy from Arunthathiyar community was drinking water from the common pipe. Velmurugan, a man from the dominant caste saw the young boy guenching his thirst. He shouted casteist slurs and heartlessly injured the boy for a harmless act of drinking water. When the young boy's deeply hurt parents dared to question Velmurugan, the dominant caste man hurled casteist slurs at them. They decided to seek justice from the panchayat with the help of Rukmani and a group of Dalits who decided to support the parents. However, on 19.05.2020, a Kangaroo court (Caste panchayat) was gathered in the name of the village meeting. In that Kangaroo court Arunthathiyar people were freely abused by the dominant caste men using casteist slurs and statements like, "You Sakkiliya boys have grown to question us!" The verbal abuse soon turned into a physical

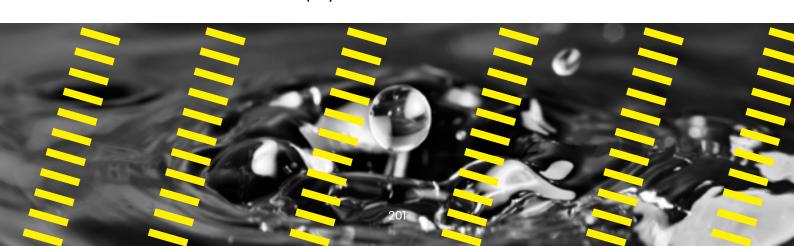
one and they lashed out violently on the group that was harmlessly seeking a dialogue to get justice. The violence injured 4 women, 1 pregnant woman, and 6 men. All injured were admitted in the Karur Government hospital.

### CURRENT STATUS

The case is booked at Mayanur Police station under section 294(b), 323, 354, 4, 3(1) (r), 3(1) (2) (va) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. A false complaint was booked on Arunthathiyar community people too by the dominant caste group to further intimidate them. The Dalits are also facing social boycott by denying them access to basic necessities like milk. The fear tactics has worked so Dalits have recently withdrawn their case.

Victims need to be provided protection. The complaint should be filed Under section 3(1) (ZC) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015. Proper legal support needs to be provided to arrest the accused.

Image Credit: Wikimedia



### Mortgaged His Life For Work

Name: Vinodbhai Ishwarbhai Solanki

Age: 45 years old

FIR Date: 4/10/2020 FIR No. 1120602020242

### Community:

Vansol village has 400 Patels, 350 Dalit, 300 Barot, 15 Muslim, 60 Raval, 80 Kumbar and 40 Rabaris. The Rabari though not in large number are feared by the Dalit especially as some of the Rabari families hail from the notorious Chatral area of Gujarat.

Location: Vansol village, Kadi block in Mehasana district of Gujarat

45-year-old Vinod Ishwarbhai Solanki worked in Vansol as a small contractor to earn a living. He was hired by three Rabari community brothers, Gafulbhai, Tejabhai and Ranchodbhai. Their extended powerful family dominates the village. The three brothers run a business of constructing rooms and rent it to migrant workers who work in the nearby industrial areas. They awarded Vinodbhai a contract for the construction of 21 rooms and gave him an advance of Rs 2 lakhs to begin work. As the construction progressed, Vinodbhai approached the brothers for

payment for the work
completed. This payment
was important for a small
contractor to complete the
work. However, the three
brothers declined and asked
him to complete the whole
work first. Vinodbhai was
forced to take a loan from a
moneylender and some of the
workers also mortgaged their
jewellery to support him; but
still the work could not be
completed. Vinodbhai was

under great stress and he shared with his wife and children about the pressure that the brothers were putting on him. All requests for payment went unheeded and as a last resort he even threatened to take his life to which the response was, "you can kill yourself or sell your wife we are not bothered; the work should be completed."

On 2nd October, at 3.30 pm while at work Sahil, Vinodbhai's son received a call from his father's mobile from an unknown person saying his father had fallen into the Narmada canal and his motorcycle and mobile were found on the banks of the canal. Sahil and his friend rushed to the spot and informed his family immediately. The police also reached the site and searched for the body, which was found the next day. Police searched the contents of the motorbike and found a suicide note which stated that, "I am unable to bear the harassment, mental pressure and threats from Gafulbhai, Tejabhai and Ranchodbhai.

I don't know how to pay back the loans and return the jewellery to the workers. Taking my life is the only way to free myself from these mortgages!" A police complaint was registered and only after the accused were arrested Vinodbhai's body was cremated.



### CURRENT STATUS

To ensure that the accused do not get bail the local

Dalit Sangathan is in dialogue with good lawyers. The Dalit Sangathan is also taking strong actions to ensure the case is investigated thoroughly. Demand has been made for police protection for the family so that the case can be investigated without any hindrance.

Image Credits: Wikimedia

### Pendency in PoA Act Registered

Cases

1,70,000 cases pending trial in 2019

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

89.6 % cases

pending trial

in 2016

97.2% cases

pending trial

in 2017

92.7% cases

pending trial

in 2018

91.4 % cases

pending trial

in 2019

204

## Trial Completion Rate

Source: National Crime Records Bureau **2,04,191 cases were up** for trial in 2019 and only 6% i.e. 12,498 saw the trial completed

## Signthis petition

Dear MP,

We, the citizens of India and the world, undersigned, would like to express our deep resentment and disappointment that the present government and particularly, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Home Affairs is not implementing the SCs and STs (PoA) Act as per the objectives stated in the Act in these trying times.

The Covid pandemic further illustrated the glaring social and economic disparity prevalent in India. The poor were left hungry, migrant laborers were beaten up by the police as they made their way home on foot to avoid starvation and homelessness, workers were fired by companies and factories... All this while the rich stayed home. Safe. Sanitizing even the vegetables brought from the market.

As for the Dalits, who find themselves most represented among the poor, we fought double marginalization as casteism bore its fangs raping us, beating us up, denying us dues for our labour, the most basic price for our crops, forcing us to travel for miles to draw water from the well, leaving us out of government entitlements, murdering us, shoving us into prisons for raising our voices against injustice.



We are not just presenting you with a set of problems in this petition but also a set of possible recourses that can set us on the right track towards undoing the harm caused to Dalit communities by the administration, its structures like the police and government officials, and the society during the Pandemic.

We urge you to forward these recommendations on your letterhead to the Prime Minister's and the Chief Minister's (of your state) office and start working towards the realization of the recommendations presented below.

These recommendations were drafted by Dalit leaders and scholars who are part of 'Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network' (DHRDNet) and other like-minded coalitions. DHRDNet is a collective of over 1000 Dalit human rights defenders from different states of India. DHRDNet mostly concentrates its work in five states - Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Recommendations to the State Governments:

- The Chief Ministers must address the nation on caste-based violence and crimes that have taken place since the Covid-19 lockdown.
- The state governments, in collaboration with Dalit led civil society organizations, should release white paper on the status of untouchability practices after a detailed survey and release a Block wise fact sheet of the ground situation.

- The State Governments should set up SC/ST protection centers at block level to ensure safety and security for the SCs/ST persons including transgender persons from these communities, who report crimes committed upon them.
- The State Governments should immediately launch a special Helpline with necessary infrastructure for persons and transgender persons from SC/ST and DNT communities to address caste atrocities, untouchability, sexual violence, domestic violence, communal conflicts, and ethnic conflicts in the wake of continuing lock down. The help line will provide police assistance, legal aid, medical and psychological counseling.
  - All the State governments should immediately convene the State Level Vigilance and Monitoring Committee under the head of respective Chief Ministers to review the cases reported across the state during the Covid-19 lockdown with top officials including the Chief Secretary, the Director of General of Police Department, Secretaries of SC/ST Department, Districts collectors and Superintendent of Police. There should be adequate representation of women and transgender persons in the committee at the district and state level. They should review the situation, assess the actions taken, and release relief and compensation to the affected person/families along with ordering investigations in cases where castebased crimes (which includes caste rapes) were committed, and release

- caste-based crimes (which includes caste rapes) were committed, and release a comprehensive report on the action taken.
- State Governments should take appropriate measures to provide entitled schemes, reliefs' packages and compensation as per the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Amendment Act of 2015, to the affected persons and transgender persons from SC/ST communities.
- The State Governments should immediately set up Exclusive Special Courts in every district for trials of the atrocity cases as per the provisions of the PoA act 2015.
   The State Governments should appoint competent and committed Exclusive special public prosecutors for cases tried in these courts.
- The High Courts should set up a committee of two of its judges to coordinate with District Courts to monitor trials of rape cases against Dalit women, and girls and transgender persons in every district of the state.
- The States should collect district level caste-disaggregated data on cases of rape, gang rape, rape with murder and other crimes against women, girls and transgender persons.

### Recommendations to the Central Government:

 The Prime Minister must address the nation on caste-based violence and crimes that have taken place since the Covid-19 lockdown.

- In next six months the Central Government should undertake a detailed survey and release a white paper on the status of the sewage worker's death and based on the survey findings ensure effective legal action and adequate compensation is provided to the families of the deceased.
- Central Government should develop and adopt sewage workers policy guidelines and regulations to safeguard the health, safety and dignity of sewage workers.
- Central Government should provide compensation to sanitation workers who died on duty during Covid-19 Lockdown fighting the pandemic.
- The Central Government must commission a monument commemorating the sanitation workers who were martyred during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The central government should direct state governments to conduct surveys on atrocities against Dalit village panchayat presidents/heads in their respective States and submit a status report on Caste discrimination/violence faced by Dalit Panchayat Presidents/ Heads.
- The Central Government should enable the National SC/ST commission to conduct thorough independent and impartial investigations into the atrocities committed against the Dalit Human Rights Defenders, in particular Dalit Women & Transgender Human Rights Defenders, and bring those responsible to justice and provide

- rehabilitative support to the DHRDs/
   DWHRDs and their families.
- The Central Government should set up a committee in consultation with Dalit led civil society organizations on the implementation of the PoA Act.
- The Central Government must enact a policy to allow filing of FIRs in SC/ST atrocity cases at SC/ST cells.
- The Central Government should direct all states who have not yet submitted the mandatory report as per section 18 of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Rules (1989) for all previous calendar years.
- The Central Government should immediately release the mandatory report under Section 21(4) of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. This report is pending since 2018. The last report tabled in Lok Sabha was of 2017.
- The Central Government should identify the States across the country in India where incidents of reported Castebased violence are on the rise during Covid-19 Lock down and declare them as an "atrocity hit prone State". The central government should then take joint actions to formulate special schemes and policies to prevent caste atrocities in these states.

### Recommendations for cases of sexual violence against Dalit women, transgender persons & girls:

- In the incidents of serious crimes of sexual violence against Dalit women, girls and transgender persons the investigation should be done by the higher Police officials particularly by women Police officer at the rank of Deputy Superintendent of police. The investigation in these atrocities should be completed within two months from the date of the atrocities.
- Adult Dalit women and transgender persons who survive sexual violence should be given a government job and monthly pension as a rehabilitative measure by the state governments.
- Minor Dalit girls and transgender persons who have survived sexual violence should be provided monetary support (through direct bank transfers) to ensure that they receive education at top institutes in the country up till post-graduation level.

To sign the petition click here: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y6bksudo">https://tinyurl.com/y6bksudo</a>

# Call to the United Nations to Build Back Better on Descent and Caste-Based Discrimination



### A Call to the United Nations to Build Forward Better on Descent and Caste-Based Discrimination

Descent and Caste-based discrimination and analogous forms of discrimination affect approximately 260 million people globally. They consist of a violation of international human rights law, inherently contradicting the universal principles of non-discrimination, dignity and equality.

Servitude for the lower castes, 'social distancing' for the upper, India's response to the pandemic is resurrecting the worst excesses of its casteist past. The pandemic has exposed the underlying social ills of untouchability and casteist attitude with the surging cases of caste and gender-based atrocities during the lockdown making the lives of the affected Dalit communities miserable and unimaginable.

The systemic and entrenched nature of caste-based human rights violations have been well established by the UN Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures Mandate Holders, the former UN Sub-Committee on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and in Universal Periodic Review.[1] Human rights bodies have consistently raised their concerns on caste-related human rights violations and continuously urged governments to strengthen the protection of affected people through legislative, policy, institutional, budgetary and other measures, thus forming a consistent State practice.

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay had made the elimination of caste-based discrimination a strategic priority in its anti-discrimination work.

However, fundamental challenges remain in all caste-affected countries. Entrenched caste biases, lack of access to justice and effective implementation of relevant policies remain the core issue.

We, the people of caste affected countries, human rights defenders, civil society organisations (CSOs) and social movements, urge the UN Human Rights Council member States to:

- Adopt the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent (A/HRC/11/CRP.3), by means of a resolution at the Human Rights Council
- Institutionalize regular reporting and effective dialogue on the elimination of discrimination based on caste and analogous forms of inherited status, according the Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, through the Human Rights Council's agenda Item 9
- Organize a panel discussion, during a HRC regular session in 2021, dedicated to caste and descentbased discrimination, raising global awareness on this matter and at providing practical guidance on eradicating this type of discrimination.

### We urge the UN member States to call on states affected by caste discrimination to:

- Implement in good faith the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in her report presented to the Human Rights Council at its 31st session (2016)
- Embrace the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, so as to ensure their implementation through national action plans to combat caste based discrimination; develop and implement national action plans with sufficient funding and clear objectives and measures for poverty reduction strategies, employment, health, education and access to basic services including water and sanitation; pay specific attention to the issues of caste-affected women, and conduct public awareness campaigns in coordination with affected groups
- Reinforce the need to implement the concluding observations and recommendations on caste discrimination by UN Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures Mandate Holders, and in Universal Periodic Reviews in the framework of national action plans
- Develop specific indicators to monitor achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals in respect of caste affected people, and the principle to leave no one behind, stated in the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25

- September 2015 [ (A/70/L.1)] 70/1.

  Transforming our world: the 2030

  Agenda for Sustainable Development

  Goals
- Consider caste-based discrimination as a serious impediment to ensuring equality in Covid-19 pandemic relief and rehabilitation, and develop appropriate disaster management laws, policies, institutions and programming in cooperation with humanitarian stakeholders and affected communities and United Nations Organizations.

### We call on the UN Special Procedures Mandates and Treaty-Bodies to:

- Strengthen the regular monitoring, reporting and dialogue with States, civil society, academia and other stakeholders of individual cases and patterns of caste and descent-based discrimination within the follow-up mechanisms of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001) and the Durban Review Conference Outcome Document (2009), in conjunction with the Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent
- Pay special attention, through an intersectional perspective, of the extremely adverse situation of women, children, girls, migrant workers, intersex, and other vulnerable sectors that are also victims of decent and caste-based discrimination

- the situation of communities discriminated on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status in under-researched regions; and initiate a thematic, regional level study in South Asia on violence against Dalit women and research on the nexus of caste discrimination and forced and bonded labor.
- We finally recommend the wider United Nations family to:
- Consider 'untouchability' and castebased atrocities in the context of crimes against humanity based on the 1998 Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute) and applicable international law

- Consider the establishment of a United Nations special mandate on discrimination based on caste and descent
- Declare April 14th (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's birthday) as the International Day of Dalit Solidarity

To sign this petition click here: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/yajogm2r">https://tinyurl.com/yajogm2r</a>



### **Author**

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### **About Us**

Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network (DHRDNet) is a coalition of over 1000 Dalit human rights defenders from across India. The main objective of DHRDNet is to create an efficient network of leading Dalit Human Rights Defenders to combat the rights abuses and to ensure that antidiscrimination mechanisms are properly and thoroughly implemented.

Activities within the Network are focused on:

- Facilitating access to justice
- Monitoring atrocities and violations against Dalit communities.
- · Communication for creating awareness and collaborations
- Strengthening capacities of the associated members

We strive to contribute in the implementation of UN Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent in India.

At present, our work is primarily focused in five states of India: Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Visit our website at www.dhrdnet.org

Join the campaign on social media to voice your protest against injustice:

Instagram: <u>Odhrdnet</u>
Twitter: <u>Odhrdnetwork</u>
Facebook: <u>ODHRDNet</u>

### Sign a petition RIGHT NOW:

Call to the United Nations to Build Back Better on Descent and Caste-Based Discrimination: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/yajogm2r">https://tinyurl.com/yajogm2r</a>

Petition to MPs with recommendations from DHRDNet: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y6bksudo">https://tinyurl.com/y6bksudo</a>



