

Dalits Face Social Boycott

[Following is a report of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) fact finding team on Social Boycott imposed on a Dalit community of Bijapur district.]

Kadakola, A small village near Basavanabagevadi in Bijapur district is in the news for the past few months for reasons not so encouraging. Chalavadi community, a lower caste in the hierarchy is facing a social boycott from the upper caste and Madigas, also a dalit community, for having used the tank water in the village.

Before the formation of Karnataka state Bijapur was a part of Mumbai province and even today one can visualize the cultural, Socio-economic moorings of the erstwhile Mumbai province in this region. The land owning pattern and the feudal system has not changed much since the British period and the social relations have, since the times of Peshwas, the maratha rulers, protected the Hindu caste hierarchy. Ironically the village Kadakola is situated 30 km away from Basavanabagevadi, the birth place of Basavanna, the 12th century social reformer, who fought against the caste system within the hindu fold. But this region has not seen any anti-caste movement nor any OBC movement and the land reforms implemented in 1970s by the Devaraj Urs government has had no effect here. There has been no effort whatsoever to disturb the socio-economic relations of the region throughout the history. And one cannot find any social or ideological tendencies here, with Dalit movement being weak and left parties having almost no support base.

But the region has a history of atrocities against the Dalits. Sasanur, a nearby village was a centre of caste conflagration in 1946 when more than 50 lower caste people were burnt alive. Dr B R Ambedkar visited the place after the incident. In 1979 a relative of local MLA had raped a Chalavadi girl and the incident was hushed up with a compensation of Rs.50/-. The infamous Dev-dasi system, once prevalent here is not found now.

It all started on 25th of July 2006 when Cahalavadi Ramanna, the president of "Forum for Protection of Human Rights of Untouch-ables" gave a press statement that the Chalavadi dalits of Kadakola, who are being prevented from using the tank water for drinking purpose for centuries, would break the tradition on 25th of July and would directly access the water themselves, as against the system of two intermediary caste people (Vaddas and Bhajanthris), pouring water to them from a distance. The district administration immediately went into action and some dalit children were made to lift water from the tank. This incident infuriated the upper caste people and they along with Madigas, also a dalit community, imposed a social boycott on the Chalavadi community, which virtually meant not engaging them on daily wages, no access to shops and flour mills and any public services and facilities available. More than anything else the tank water was polluted to avoid Chalavadi dalits using it.

On 17th of October 2006 Justice Sadashiva Commission, appointed by the state to study violations in implementation of statutory rights of SCs and STs, was camping in Bijapur and the Chalavadi dalits of Kadakola conducted a sit-in demonstration in front of the commission's office, protesting against the social boycott imposed on them. Justice Sadashiva promised the protesters of intimating the same to the government for further action.

But much damage had already been done in the village. The Chalavadis were denied jobs from 25th of July itself, they had no access to any shops to buy their daily needs, and the families were starving for months. Muniyappa, a 75-year-old bonded labour working for a landlord for the past 25 years, for a mere 2 quintals of jowar per year, was kicked out from the job. Temples and government corridors were closed for them and the students were barred from taking part in any functions of the school. The three doctors in the village refused to attend to Chalavadi dalit patients and the government hospital was open to them from 25th October 2006.

After these incidents appeared in the press, many groups and parties visited the village. The prominent among them being Maruti Manpade of CPI-M, Dhimathi Kaladagi of KRRS, Lakshmana Banahatti of Dalit Panthers. They could find out that even though more than 40 cases of atrocities have been reported in the village, the government's "Committee against atrocities on SC-ST" has never paid a visit to the place and no minister has visited the village. The above groups apprehended the fear of torching of Chalavadi colony by the upper castes and demanded for withdrawal of the boycott and providing jobs to the community people immediately. All these groups planned for a March to DC office at Bijapur on 4th November 2006.

In this backdrop the PUCL team visited Kadakola on 27-28th October 2006. The village is situated on the banks of River Doni, with black soil suitable for growing cotton, Jowar and other dry crops. There are 500 houses in the village of which 86 are of Chalavadi dalits, 50 Reddy lingayats (veersahaivas), 50 Ganigas, 30 Talvars, 40 Madigas and 40 Muslims, as told by Mallikarjuna Chala-vadi, who says that the Reddy-Lingyats own majority of land holdings. Neither Madigas nor Chalavadis own any land, though 2-3 years back government had disbursed some land to 4-5 dalits. Among Chalavadis some 30 youth have studied upto 10th standard, 8 of them being girls. As the borewell water in the village is salty, all dalits depend on the tank water for drinking purpose. Untouch-ability is being practiced in several ways here, apart from the present boycott. When the upper castes cross the river, the untouchables, i.e., Chalavadis, are supposed to carry their slippers to the other end of the river. The wages paid to the agricultural labours are Rs.30-40 for men and 12-20 for women.

After Ramanna Chalavadi gave the press statement, all the upper castes and the Madigas assembled in a temple and decided unanimously to impose social boycott on the Chalavadi dalits. "The government has paid compensation for 15 days, now we don't have any work on hand nor any government help. The DC is speaking of compromise settlement but to no avail. We are unable to fetch any provisions. Two upper caste men have been booked under atrocity case for

having beaten Mr.Chayappa with slippers, and they are infuriated. But no case has been booked against those imposing boycott, for more than 3 months we are starving and surviving on assistance from relatives. The BJP MLA Shivaputra Desai is advising us to compromise, but we are not being compensated nor do we have a penny on hand, there are no telephone facilities for us. We have all voted to these parties and candidates and Taluk panchayat member of Telgi Nyamannanavar, president Srimantha Hallagi belong to our village, but his brother Ningappa Basantharappa Hallagi is the man behind the boycott, both these brothers are united against us and all these leaders belong to the reddy-lingayat community” so narrates Smt. Chalavadi Yamunamma.

Sangappa Shivappa says ‘We are afraid of our houses being torched and so we keep awake throughout the nights. Madigas are also using the tank water but they have joined with the upper castes. More than 70 muslim families in the villages have stood by us and they have saved us from attacks from upper castes. The village is still haunted by the spectre of caste discrimination. On the Dipavali day a 10-year-old Chalavadi boy was driven out from a cracker shop calling him an untouchable.”

Muniyappa Chalavadi had more to say, “We are afraid the 60-year-old Sasanur incident may repeat here as the upper castes are threatening us of torching our houses. Today there are no Chalavadis in Sasanur. If we were to live happily we should be shifted to the other side of the river near Allamaprabhu temple,otherwise we should be given poison” says Muniyappa sadly.

When the team met Mr Srimanth Allagi, the president of Taluk Panchayat, who belongs to the reddy- lingayat community, he said, “We have advised all the villagers to live in harmony” and by that time a news of fire at Kadakola made him fly from the scene.

Then the team proceeded to Basavanabagevadi and met Tahasil-dar Mr M R Reddy, who, after hearing us said that “the administration has given job for the affected people worth one lakh rupees and 10kgs of rations is being provided to each family”. Visiting team members were also told that Atrocity case has been booked against 2 persons. When questioned “Why no such case has been filed against those imposing the boycott” the Tahasildar told the team that they were trying for a compromise settlement amicably.

Then the team met the DC at Bijapur and he said the administration had taken steps to give jobs for the Chalavadis. When questioned about filing of cases against the perpetrators of crimes, the DC said “He has not received any complaints”. To the team’s observation that the upper castes of Kadakola had not stood by their promise of withdrawing boycott, as assured to the DC and the district administration has not taken any steps to file a case against the perpetrators of the crime during the past three months, the DC had a ready answer “We are trying to solve the problem amicably through negotiations”. In fact the DC tried to pass on the blame on outsiders, i.e., Dalit leaders from outside, for creating all the trouble. But on October 28, '06 the Dalits of

Kadakala were found to have lost much enthusiam because of hunger and reprisal. ~~del del~~