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## **Attack on Dalits: 74 Dalit houses were looted and burnt**

**Madhubani Bihar:** Yadav community of neighboring village Mohanpur Purvari Tola under 'Pandol' police station stormed the 'Musahar Tola' in 'Ranti' Panchayat under 'Rajnagar' police station with 4 tractors, including 46. The huge gang of perpetrators came to the village and started beating up the Dalits, looted the belongings of the Dalits and set the houses of Dalits on fire. Around 74 Dalit houses were looted and burnt, another 70 Dalit houses looted and partially damaged Dalit men and women beaten resulting in 8 seriously injured Dalits being hospitalized. The fundamental cause of this mass violence is Dalits asserting their right of franchise. The fact finding mission of National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW) comprising eminent citizens such as Padmashree Sr. Sudha Varghese and Mr. Kishori Das get into the case.

National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW), a platform of state level organizations and Activists working to uphold Dalit Human Rights, has been established with Adv. P.L. Mimroth as its convener to diligently watch the elections that to bring into public attention the gross violations of rights and report the matter to the Election Commission and the concerned officers wherein urging their immediate intervention to the matter and to ensure free and fair environment to exercise free and fair exercise of franchise of Dalit communities, so that they can vote without fear of threat, intimidation and violence.

During the Monitoring of II Phase election in Bihar NDEW came across the mass atrocity on Dalits Musahar village of Ranti Panchayat in Madhubani District and immediately swung into action by constituting a fact finding mission.

What the mission saw in the 'Musahar Tola' in 'Ranti' Panchayat has been devastating, with nearly the whole village reduced to ash. After talking to the villagers we found out that on 24<sup>th</sup> April morning at around 8:00 am a huge gang of people from 'Yadav' community, residents of the neighboring village 'Mohanpur Purvari Tola' in 'Pandol' Panchayat under 'Pandol' police station stormed the 'Musahar Tola' in 'Ranti' Panchayat under 'Rajnagar' police station with 4 (four) tractors, including 46 people (as stated by one of the victims who were admitted to hospital due to resultant injury). The huge gang of perpetrators came to the village (Musahar Tola) and started beating up the Dalits, looted the belongings of the Dalits and set the houses of Dalits on fire. Around 74 Dalit houses were looted and burnt, another 70 Dalit houses looted and partially damaged Dalit men and women beaten resulting in 8 seriously injured Dalits being hospitalized. In this incident at least 400 to 500 Dalits are affected in terms of their shelter and properties being destroyed, their livelihood (livestock and grains) perished. Now they are in the state of Trauma and fear struggling to resume their normal life. Talking to the victims it was found that there had been tension between the two communities for more than a year. This tension was ignited by two recent incidents between these two communities. This tension was ignited by recent two incidents within the villagers of these two communities, namely:

1. Dalits of 'Musahar Tola' asserted their rights to fish in a stream of water which is a public resort. (Dated: 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009)
2. Dalits of 'Musahar Tola' asserted their rights to vote according to their will during the current General Election 2009. (Dated: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009)

**Fact finding mission met with various officials, visiting the incident place:**

1. The SDO confirmed that he has provided Rs. 1,000 per family as immediate relief, 'Chura' (stuffed rice) and jaggery as food relief. He also said he is checking the list of villages for providing relief, pensions, etc. He also said that order/approval for providing housing under Indira Awas Yojana scheme for the victims have been secured. But surprisingly this list consists of only 67 names where as the real number of victims is much higher.
2. The police officer of Raj Nagar police station confirmed that SC/ST (PoA) Act is included in this FIR. But when we actually saw the FIR copy we have found that the SC/ST (PoA) Act was not invoked properly. So we demanded that the relevant sections be added in the FIR (registered under Rajnagar PS, case no. 123/09) against the perpetrators under section 3(2) (iii), 3(2)(iv), 3(2)(v), and section 3(1)(vii), 3(1)(x) & 3(1)(xiv) of SC/ST (POA) Act 1989.
3. We also discussed this incident with the Divisional Commissioner, the District Magistrate, the SP, the DIG about this incident when they visited the village. We clarified that the villagers are supposed to get Rs. 2,250/- instead of Rs1,000. He also confirmed that along with Indira Awas Yojana Housing scheme for the villagers, Rs.10000 will be provided to the villagers for repairing the house. He also discussed with the sarpanch and the panchayat Pramukh (Sansdyadevi ) on how to bring the normal amicable environment among the two communities.
4. Next day morning we met with the Divisional Commissioner at Dharbanga where he agreed with our demands verbatim and immediately instructed the SP to add the relevant sections of SC/ST (PoA) Act in the case. He also forwarded our demands to the SP.
5. On 27<sup>th</sup> April our local Team submitted representation to the Superintendent of Police who assured that an immediate action will be taken by the administration and the perpetrators will not be spared.

NDEW is in the process of giving this case more visibility and transparency thorough the media as well as awareness drives among the villagers and are continuously in touch with the survivors to give them a sense of security.

Mission team explained the survivors the actual status of the case as well as the FIR. They (Mr. Buddhu Saday and other complainants of the registered FIR) are illiterate Dalits who has given their left thumb impression in the FIR, so they should be consistent with their statement during questioning under section 164 (one of our demand), and prevent their version from being manipulated.

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