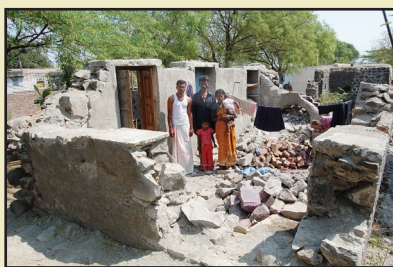


Exclusion of Dalits in the Flood Rehabilitation

Bijapur district, Karnataka



A study undertaken by HRFDL (K)
&
National Dalit Watch - March 2010



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THE devastation which went on for six days since 28 September 2009 in North Karnataka wiped out many lives, brought down thousands of houses, and rendered many more homeless. It deprived many backward and poor families of their means of livelihood. However, such a massive tragedy has already been forgotten.

The situation was heart-rending when we visited the flood-affected region in March this year -- not even half a year into the incident. Pain and misery were etched on the faces of the victims. During our study, what stood out was the situation of Dalits who were left out of the relief and rehabilitation programmes because of their caste and the resultant injustice that persists in our country by successfully muffling their voices and their fight for justice.

Against this background, this report — **Exclusion of Dalits in the Flood Rehabilitation, Bijapur District, Karnataka** — primarily focuses on the impact of the floods and the way in which Dalits, especially women and children, have been left out of the relief and rehabilitation programmes launched by the Karnataka Government. The State Government designed various schemes and promised that it would lend a helping hand to all the flood victims in North Karnataka. Unfortunately, the ground reality clearly exposes how empty these promises have been.

Massive funds to the tune of crores of rupees have been sanctioned both at the Central and State level. Many MNCs, donor agencies, religious mutts, and NGOs have also come forward to support the victims by adopting villages. But still, lapses are far too many. Support has not reached a majority of the victims as they are still struggling to live with dignity in the absence of basic amenities. We came across many cases where the government has made many promises but has simply forgotten to do its duty. In other cases, these promises have not been deliberately fulfilled because of caste prejudice.

The testimonies of the people given here amply prove that the plight of the Dalit flood victims was worsened further by age-old prejudices and deliberate inaction. A look at the temporary sheds and the kind of life being led by the victims itself speak volumes for the poor quality of relief and rehabilitation work being carried out by the State Government. Such blatant injustice and discrimination against the Dalit population is nothing short of human rights violation.

On behalf of Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation in Karnataka (HRFDL-K), I would like to place on record my sincere and deep appreciation for Ms Savita Hiremath for devoting her time to supervise this study and write this report. She has, in a short time, systematically organised the findings and wrote comprehensively to lay bare the real situation.

I also thank our team of investigators — Dr Ram Kallal, Mr Ningappa, Ms Sujatha Chaluvadi, and Ms Sharada -- who visited the villages, conducted the survey, and helped in collating and compiling the data. Their painstaking work has helped us understand the ground reality which could have gone otherwise unnoticed.

I also thank all the members of our Bijapur HRFDL-K Sanga Samasthe who lent technical support to the team and also collated facts and figures from government sources related to this tragedy.

My sincere thanks to Mr Prasad Chako from NCDHR, and Ms Lee Macqueen from National Dalit Watch, Delhi, for contributing ideas and forwarding suggestions to make this study worth all our efforts. Finally, I would like to thank NCDHR and National Dalit Watch for financial support to carry out this study. Without their support, we would not have been able to publish this report.

I sincerely believe that the State Government takes note of this study and ensures justice by making the victims' living conditions better.

— **BASVARAJ KOWTAL**
State Convenor, HRFDL-K,
Bangalore

ABOUT HRFDL-K & National Dalit Watch

THE Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation- Karnataka (HRFDL-K) members belong to the untouchable community. Its Karnataka-based activists have been active members of various social movements, particularly Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS).

HRFDL-K was conceived to accelerate the Dalit struggle in Karnataka with a human rights perspective. The key attributes of this network which differentiates it from other groups are that it upholds the values of gender equity and promotes Dalit women leadership through a transparent, decentralized, and participatory approach in all its initiatives.

In the past eight years, HRFDL-K has been able to anchor itself as a strong and sustained struggle towards the liberation of Dalits in Karnataka. Its concerted efforts have built a critical mass base in 11 districts, 22 taluks, 44 Zilla Panchayats, and approximately 1,200 villages in Karnataka. Every member of HRFDL-K is capable of leading campaigns and issue-based advocacy efforts.

Its major target groups include community-based organisations (CBOs) headed by women, Dalit lawyers, Dalit Panchayat members, and Dalit students. Lobbying and advocacy efforts at the State level are complemented by campaigns at the grass-roots. They include land struggle, panchayat election campaign, campaign for justice in caste violence and violence against Dalit women, right to education of Dalit children, food security [ICDS & NREG], right to health campaign, campaigns for SC/ST hostels, implementation of reservation especially in the private sector, struggle against the impacts of globalisation, and against the Hindu fascist groups.

HRFDL-K has been able to build its own identity, while extending solidarity to various other progressive peoples' struggles at State and national levels.



National Dalit Watch

The National Dalit Watch (NDW) is an initiative of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) which has emerged from an informed recognition of the rampant discrimination and exclusion faced by Dalit communities during disaster response and mitigation. Building on the experiential base of NCDHR in exposing and countering exclusion in some of the major disasters of our times (Tsunami in 2004, Bihar Floods in 2007 and 2008), NDW has been working towards developing tools and methods to identify, expose, and document this form of discrimination. NDW enables Dalit rights organizations, local activists, and the community leadership in various parts of the country to effectively monitor discrimination and exclusion during disasters. Through advocacy and mobilization, the NDW works towards instituting a policy environment that recognizes such discrimination and defining entitlements of survivors in a manner that makes the State accountable.

I

FOREWORD

THE catastrophe that struck Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in September-October 2009 will remain etched in the memory of the people forever. The destruction left scores dead, rendered millions hungry and homeless, flattened lakhs of acres of standing crops, and orphaned and dislocated many more.

In North Karnataka alone, which bore the brunt of the floods, 229 people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands of people sought shelter in relief camps. According to the Karnataka government sources, 6.55 lakh houses have collapsed; 7,882 livestock perished; 4,292 villages have been affected in 75 taluks across 14 districts, of which 346 villages need complete rehabilitation. In all, 400 schools and 1,050 anganwadis have been washed away, and 3,000 more schools severely damaged.

According to the Karnataka Agriculture Department, North Karnataka suffered a double whammy as some parts of the region were reeling under drought prior to the floods. As a result, sowing could not be undertaken in 1.66 lakh hectares; in fact, only 69.68 lakh were sown as against 71.34 lakh hectares last year. Post-floods, the region lost standing crops in 22 lakh hectares of land. As for sugarcane, one of the main crops of the area, the loss is estimated to be worth at least Rs 500 crores (Business Standard, Nov 03).

The loss that these figures manage to capture is an understatement when compared with the mental agony that the people have been going through. First, they were traumatised by the worst floods of this century with the waters washing away the people, their livestock, and the fragile mud walls of their houses. Weeks later, when the flood-hit populace limped back to life, they were in for another shock. The world around them had changed dramatically. In some places, there was no sign of the past at all. Amidst heaps of rubble and ruins, the harried victims began picking up the threads of life all over again. As it is, life was hard for a majority of the affected populace. The second round of agony struck them without a respite. Death, disease, hunger, deprivation, dispossession, distress migration, rural indebtedness, and unremitting poverty are now stalking them relentlessly.

A tragedy of such monumental proportions naturally called for mammoth relief operations. Caught unawares, the Karnataka Government launched emergency operations focusing on immediate relief and rescue efforts. However, the devastation was so widespread that by the time the relief teams reached the flood-hit places, the victims had already suffered the worst ever crisis of their lives. They lay marooned for over 24-30 hours without food, hung on grimly under the pounding rains, and watched helplessly their houses and crops being washed away by the floods.

Amidst such a crisis, however, some things have remained unchanged. The people are now up against a system that is yet to respond whole-heartedly to the grief-stricken lot. Although the fury of the floods was indiscriminate as it wreaked havoc on every living thing under its spell, the Dalit population found itself left out of the relief and rescue operations for obvious reasons. Thanks to the age-old caste system that inevitably relegates them to the background; the plight of the Dalits lays bare serious violation of human rights.



The objective

Many instances of atrocities against Dalits came to the fore when the district units of the Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka (HRFDL-K) visited the flood-hit areas immediately after the floods. Struck by the blatant bias against the Dalits, the HRFDL-K staff stepped up its efforts, toured many flood-hit villages, and gathered information on such incidents. Meanwhile, it met some Bangalore-based NGOs that had participated in the relief operations. Their reports revealed that discrimination against Dalits was widespread and that in some places, the NGO staff was not even allowed to enter the Dalit colonies by the local officials. The latter, while giving priority to the needs of the upper caste people, had reportedly ignored the pleas of the Dalits for basic human needs like food, clothes, and shelter. Also, the victims' repeated requests to survey Dalit colonies fallen on deaf ears.

Based on the first-hand reports and personal observations of its staff members, the Forum came to a conclusion that only an in-depth study would further substantiate its reports. Almost five months after the devastation, the study got underway in the worst-hit Bijapur district.

The objectives behind the study were to figure out if Dalits received equal attention and care as did the upper caste people when the relief operations were underway; to check whether the temporary shelters erected by the government have been helpful; to assess whether the compensation given for the losses suffered was sufficient; and also to explore the current situation in general, and the plight of women and children in particular.



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II

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE catastrophe that struck Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in September-October 2009 will remain etched in the memory of the people forever. The destruction left scores dead, rendered millions hungry and homeless, flattened lakhs of acres of standing crops, and orphaned and dislocated many more.

Weeks later, when the flood-hit populace limped back to life, they were in for another shock. The world around them had changed dramatically. In some places, there was no sign of the past at all. Amid heaps of rubble and ruins, the harried victims began picking up the threads of life all over again. As it is, life was hard for a majority of the affected populace. The second round of agony struck them without a respite. Death, disease, hunger, deprivation, dispossession, distress migration, rural indebtedness, and unremitting poverty are now stalking them relentlessly.

During the survey, certain discrepancies came to light with regard to relief operations. When asked whether they were able to access relief material on time, 90% of the respondents replied 'no', while only 7% said 'yes'. Many Dalits regretted how the local officials favoured people of their own caste and ill-treated the Dalits. When questioned if there was any caste-based discrimination while distributing the relief material, 75% of the respondents said 'yes', while 24% said 'no'.

Compensation has been one of the most important aspects of rehabilitation that has received maximum criticism in the media. Although people of all castes have expressed dissatisfaction over the measly compensation distributed for house damage and crop loss; once again, the Dalit population has been at the receiving end, thanks to the brazen discrimination.

The main reasons behind this dissatisfaction is lack of proper survey of Dalit colonies, lack of scientific and professional assessment of the damage caused by the floods, and of course, large-scale corruption especially at the local level.

Going by the turn of events, it is not surprising that an overwhelming 92% of the Dalits answered 'no' when asked if they received suitable compensation as against only 8% who replied in the affirmative.

Once the emergency relief operations were wound up and the officials began distributing compensation to the victims, newspapers and TV news bulletins were replete with reports highlighting the level of corruption happening at the local level. The officials not only fixed a measly compensation despite massive losses incurred by the victims, but also demanded a part of it as bribe. When asked if they had noticed corruption in the distribution of compensation by the government officials, 73% of the respondents replied in the affirmative and 27% said 'no'.

Caste bias has spawned a number of serious human rights violations. When asked if they thought Dalits had not been treated on a par with people from other castes because of

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caste prejudice, 80% of the respondents said 'yes', while 20% said 'no'. Similarly, to a question whether they had experienced any discrimination in relief and rehabilitation services in comparison with the dominant caste communities, 76% said 'yes', the rest said 'no'.

The case studies in this report reveal how women, especially those who have lost their houses, are struggling without basic facilities like bathrooms and toilets. The massive floods coupled with hunger and lack of privacy has landed them in a seemingly perpetual mess. Responding to a question whether they thought Dalit women had not been treated on a par with women from the upper caste because of caste prejudice, 84% of the women said 'yes' and the rest said 'no'.

Their children have also been put through unspeakable trauma during and after the deluge. Hunger stalked them then and is unrelenting even now. To a question whether there were any instances of their children being left out because of the caste while distributing the relief material, 84% of mothers said yes, 8% said 'no', while the remaining 8% said they were not even aware of the facilities their infants were supposed to get.



The case studies in this report reveal how women, especially those who have lost their houses, are struggling without basic facilities like bathrooms and toilets

III

METHODOLOGY

THIS survey, conducted in the first week of March 2010, was spread over two taluks of Bijapur district -- Bijapur and Indi -- as they were the worst-hit in terms of loss of human lives and livestock, and damage to property and standing crops. To make sure that the responses of the victims were accurately recorded, an open-ended questionnaire comprising 54 questions was used. Four surveyors, who had prior experience in research studies, visited 20 villages in two taluks. Ten villages were selected from each taluk keeping in mind the degree of devastation caused by the floods. Each surveyor interviewed five households.

The villages surveyed

BIJAPUR TALUK

1. Arakeri
2. Hittangihal
3. Hittinahalli
4. Hukumanal
5. Jummanal
6. Karajol
7. Katakanahalli
8. Onaginahal
9. Thonasihal
10. Uthnal

INDI TALUK

11. AHIRASANGHA
12. Anjotagi
13. Arjunagi KD
14. Chawadihal
15. Chewargi
16. Chikka Bevanur
17. Nada BK
18. Nada KD
19. Salotagi
20. Shirashad



Since the main objective behind this survey was to record the post-flood situation of Dalits, the questions sought answers on whether they were left behind in the relief and rehabilitation efforts owing to caste prejudice. There were also questions on how helpful the relief operations were, what kind of losses they suffered, and whether the compensation paid has been sufficient. When it comes to rehabilitation, the victims' current living conditions, the facilities provided by the government and the lack of the same were recorded.

That apart, four surveyors conducted case studies of the victims from all age groups and economic status. At the fag end of the survey, the research assistants visited the people residing in temporary sheds and studied the living conditions and the facilities provided by the Government. These efforts have been supplemented by photographs that lay bare the true situation. Since the author of this report had also visited Hiresindhogi, Kakkaragol, Halegondabalu of Koppal district and Shridharagadde, Hachcholli, and Kudadaral villages in Siruguppa taluk of Bellary district in the second week of November, articles published by India Together have been inserted as annexure.



IV

THE FINDINGS

BASED on these studies, the findings of the survey have been broadly categorised as follows:

1. RELIEF OPERATIONS

- a. Distribution of relief material
- b. Ganji Kendras (gruel centres)
- c. Temporary sheds

2. COMPENSATION

- a. Survey of Dalit colonies
- b. Assessment of damage
- c. Corruption
- d. Norms of assistance from CRF & NCCF vs. the reality

3. CASTE BIAS & THE CONSEQUENCES

- a. The plight of women and children



1. RELIEF OPERATIONS

FOR any government machinery, putting in place foolproof relief and rescue operations in devastated areas can turn out to be extremely difficult. This problem is almost always compounded by the fact that disasters often catch the people unawares. Although it has been argued in the media that this particular disaster was man-made and that timely measures like desilting of check-dams and proper cells working round-the-clock to monitor the release of water at dams would have minimised the damage to a great extent, this line of argument was sidelined by the most urgent issue at hand -- to ensure relief and rehabilitation to the affected people.

When it comes to relief operations, certain discrepancies came to light during the survey. Admittedly, the tragedy was unprecedented and many villages were cut off due to damaged roads and water-logging, thus stranding the relief teams and the trucks loaded with relief material. However, the surveyors met scores of people who alleged that discrimination against Dalits was obvious and deliberate. Hence what ensued later cannot be brushed aside as an inevitable fallout of an impossible situation.

When asked whether they were able to access relief material on time, 90% of the respondents replied 'no', while 7% said 'yes'.

a. Distribution of relief material

IN the first few days, even as the government machinery, working in tandem with a number of NGOs, reached the affected spots; truckloads of relief material started pouring in from all corners of the State. However, the degree of destruction and the massive crowds that gathered around the trucks were so overwhelming that the relief teams were simply overpowered. The famished victims rushed to the trucks making it impossible to distribute food, clothes, blankets, utensils, lanterns, and other essential items in a methodical manner.

However, in a majority of the villages, it was the Dalits who were deprived of the most basic and urgent needs. The reasons are many. First of all, it's Dalits who live on the fringes and are used to being treated as non-entities. Observe any village, the topography is such that its prominent roads often lead to either a temple or a school or a panchayat office. In some cases, it is even possible to see all these buildings situated in a row. These are the places where most important activities of the village take place including festivals, village elders' meetings, etc. Also, these are the places that prohibit Dalits from mingling with the rest of the villagers. Hence, it can be assumed that distribution of the relief material took place in these spots. Since the curtain of caste bias naturally separates the Dalits from the privileged population, those who muscled their way through the crowd, in this case the upper caste people, were able to lay their hands on the essentials.

Another reason that came to light during the survey is the biased intervention of the officialdom that is dominated by the upper caste people. Barring a few villages which have elected Dalit gram panchayat members, the bureaucrats invariably come from the upper caste. During the survey, many Dalits regretted how the local officials favoured people of their own caste and ill-treated them. When questioned if there was any caste-based discrimination while distributing the relief material, 75% of the respondents said 'yes', while 24% said 'no'.



Barring a few villages which have elected Dalit gram panchayat members, the bureaucrats invariably come from the upper caste

Apathy cut so deep that the Dalit children and elderly people who could hardly move didn't even get enough blankets



These findings can be authenticated by the following incident. In Kotyala of Bijapur taluk which boasts a Dalit Gram Panchayat chairman, things have hardly changed for the better. Says Ramesh of the same village: "This (having a Dalit GP president) has not helped us one bit. In fact, each time we approach him for facilities, we sense that he is hesitating and is afraid of something. We don't know if he is under pressure from someone else. But nothing has been done for Dalits so far."

b. Ganji kendras (gruel centres)

GRUEL centres were set up in many villages to provide food in the first three months. However, in many places, they were shut down within 15-20 days. According to the Bijapur Zilla Panchayat sources, 45 centres were set up in Bijapur taluk benefitting 7,642 people while 17 centres served food to 3,500 people in Indi taluk.

This is where the Dalits witnessed open discrimination. The upper caste people were served the food first and the Dalits had to come back with leftovers or sometimes even empty-handed. Women and children weren't spared either. Says Shivamma Andappa Doddamani, 75, of Arjunagi of Bijapur taluk, "there were a couple of gruel centres set up in our village. But we did not go there because we were told they (the upper caste people) were cooking for themselves."

In many cases, they were reduced to begging as most of them had lost stocked grains and other food items to the floods. Apathy cut so deep that the Dalit children and elderly people who could hardly move didn't even get enough blankets.

The statement of Siddhappa Shankarappa Bhavimani, 31, Shirashyad, Indi taluk, makes things clearer: Siddhappa and his Dalit neighbours faced a similar situation when the government set up a gruel centre in their village. "The entire relief operation was managed by the upper caste people. They were the ones overseeing the ganji kendra activities. Naturally, they made sure that their wives and children were served enough food and the Dalits had to be content with leftovers. This has hurt us deeply. They did not care if our children were crying or dying of hunger."

Accordingly, when asked if the ganji kendras were useful and served enough food for the family, as many as 68% said 'no', whereas 28% said 'yes'. The remaining 4% said the centres weren't set up in their villages or were too far away from their village. Incidentally, none of these villages surveyed had a gruel centre set up exclusively for Dalits even though the intensity of atrocities against the untouchables is high in rural areas.

c. Temporary sheds

THE sheds constructed to house the victims immediately after the floods turned out to be inhospitable for Dalits as most of them were chased away by the upper caste people. The latter could not digest the fact that untouchables were seeking shelter right next to their sheds.

Even in cases where Dalits were able to occupy the sheds, segregation happened quickly and they were once again sent back to the periphery. In places like Bijapur where sum-

mers get intolerable, it has become well nigh impossible to live in these sheds. The situation is further compounded by lack of basic amenities including safe drinking water.

Yashwant Kudik, 30, of Chakkalagi, Bijapur taluk, says more than 10-12 people had to share one 10"x10" shed. There were no basic amenities and the people, especially women, had to bathe in the open. There were no makeshift toilets either. "It's been six months since we have been living here. We are still struggling with our day-to-day needs."

2. COMPENSATION

THIS is one of the most important aspects of rehabilitation that has received maximum criticism in the media. Although people of all castes have expressed dissatisfaction over the measly compensation distributed for house damage and crop loss; once again, the Dalit population has been at the receiving end.

The main reasons behind this dissatisfaction is lack of proper survey of Dalit colonies, lack of scientific and professional assessment of the damage caused by the floods, and of course, large-scale corruption especially at the local level.

Going by the turn of events, it is not surprising that an overwhelming 92% of the Dalits answered 'no' when asked if they received suitable compensation as against only 8% who replied in the affirmative.

a. Survey of Dalit colonies

IN many villages, the village accountant and the secretary refused to step into the Dalit colony to assess the damage. During the survey, many Dalits complained that the officials sat in panchayat offices or temples and fixed the compensation arbitrarily. Hence, it is not surprising that the Dalits got compensation as paltry as Rs 500 to Rs 1500 in most cases, whereas many upper caste victims were given up to Rs 37,000 -- maximum compensation fixed by the government for house damages.

In some villages, the local officials did visit the Dalit colonies but only after repeated pleas by the victims. The surveyors came across many Dalits who complained that the officials were reluctant to conduct the survey. But when they finally agreed to enter the colonies, their approach was far from professional. They jotted down some points in the ledgers carelessly and went off. In some other villages, repeated surveys have been held but the compensation hasn't reached the victims yet.

Complaints of this nature were abundant when the author of this report visited Koppal and Bellary districts in November 2009. Scores of poor people complained that the rich got a better deal and felt that the bureaucrats' chilling disregard was rooted in the inherent prejudice that those who live in huts and on the fringes did not deserve anything better.

In Tonsihal, according to Shankrappa Ningappa Madar, 56, the assistant commissioner and the tahsildar visited the colony and noted down many of their pleas and problems. "But



In some villages, the local officials did visit the Dalit colonies but only after repeated pleas by the victims

we have not got the relief yet.” Similarly, Bhimasi Yashavantha T, 31, Arakere, also says relief is yet to reach them despite the officials’ visit.

Be it in Tonsihal or Arakere or in fact, in most of the villages surveyed, although the damage assessment was carried out by village accountants and secretaries, it was done in a shoddy and lackadaisical manner. The words of Mugathabai S Shivasharana of Ahiras-angha sums up the collective frustration of the Dalits: “They visited because we forced them. They just glanced around. We are neither happy, nor satisfied with the survey. Only the upper caste people have benefited from this. Katacharakke madida hagittu (it was as if they did it on obligation).”

When asked whether the Dalit colonies were surveyed, 77 % said ‘yes’, while 19% said ‘no’. However, when questioned if they were satisfied with the survey, 23% said ‘yes’, whereas a whopping 77% of the respondents said ‘no’.



b. Assessment of damage

WHEN you take a cursory look at the flooded and flattened houses, it takes little to analyse whether the houses are liveable or not. A tiny mud house has a collapsed wall and its neighbouring house has half the roof torn apart. In yet another house, the façade is so fragile that it can collapse any moment. Soiled cotton bales, soaked jowar, sunflower, and groundnut sacks stacked in dark corners grimly remind the disaster gone by. In front of such houses, which the officials have termed “partially damaged”, old men and women keeping a watch on stray dogs and monkeys is a common sight. Heaps of bricks and stone slabs, broken doors, and damaged roofs still lay scattered in every drought-hit village visited by the surveyors. Needless to say, this disorder has a lot to do with the mental and emotional status of the people.

For a damage of such proportions, the victims have got a compensation ranging from Rs 150 - 5000. It clearly shows lack of scientific assessment of the damage by experts. In fact, this task was dumped on the village accountant and the secretary who were professionally ill-equipped to carry out the task. The result is a slipshod survey. Although it can be argued that people of all castes have been victimised by such large-scale corruption, caste bias has pushed the Dalits over the edge. Case studies conducted by the surveyors reveal all this and more.

Hesaravva Mahadeva Malagolla of Honagahalli feels that the upper castes have been favoured in all aspects of rehabilitation. “They have got compensation although their houses weren’t damaged as much as ours.”

If this is the case with ‘partially’ and fully damaged houses, those who suffered complete crop loss have not been spared either. For having lost standing crops in four-fives acres of land, the victims have got a relief ranging from Rs 800 to Rs 1300. Once again, scientific assessment was lacking here too and hence, only arbitrary decisions ruled the roost.

At last, death, the most serious loss of all, has also been treated with equal indifference. A case in point is 25-year-old Dyamavva Ravikanth of Arjunagi, who lost two of her children -- an eight-year-old girl who was washed away in the floods and an infant born a few days after the floods which succumbed to undiagnosed illness. A distraught Dyamavva is still waiting for compensation.

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c. Corruption

ONCE the emergency relief operations were wound up and the officials began distributing compensation to the victims, newspapers and TV news bulletins were replete with reports highlighting the level of corruption happening at the local level. The officials not only fixed a measly compensation despite massive losses incurred by the victims, they demanded a part of it as bribe.

Says Bhimasi Yashavantha T, 31, Arakere: "Our house has completely collapsed. But we have received only 500 rupees as compensation."

Having gone terribly wrong with the survey and later, allotting meagre compensation to even those whose houses were completely submerged, the local officials have made people run from pillar to post to get what is rightfully theirs. In Chikkadevanur, P Basavaraj Sukhadev narrates another story. In this village, the local officials showed generosity by giving a slightly higher compensation to some victims but that did not last long. They came back instantly armed with notices and told people to return most of it (refer to Annexure 1). "The survey is over, but those who got a little more compensation have been told to return it. There's a lot of corruption going on here. They asked for bribe while distributing cheques also," he adds.

Similarly, another Dalit says the village accountant in Jummanal asked for a cut of Rs 200 for writing a cheque of Rs 1,500. Appasaab Shivasharana, 50, Ahirasangha, has been yet another victim of bureaucratic apathy and corruption. "Every official demanded money from us. Those who gave a little (as bribe), got a little more. Those who could not did not get anything."

When asked if they noticed corruption in distribution of compensation by the government officials, 73% of the respondents replied in the affirmative and 27% said 'no'.



Our house has completely collapsed. But we have received only 500 rupees as compensation

d. Norms of assistance from Calamity Relief Fund & National Calamity Contingency Fund vs. the reality

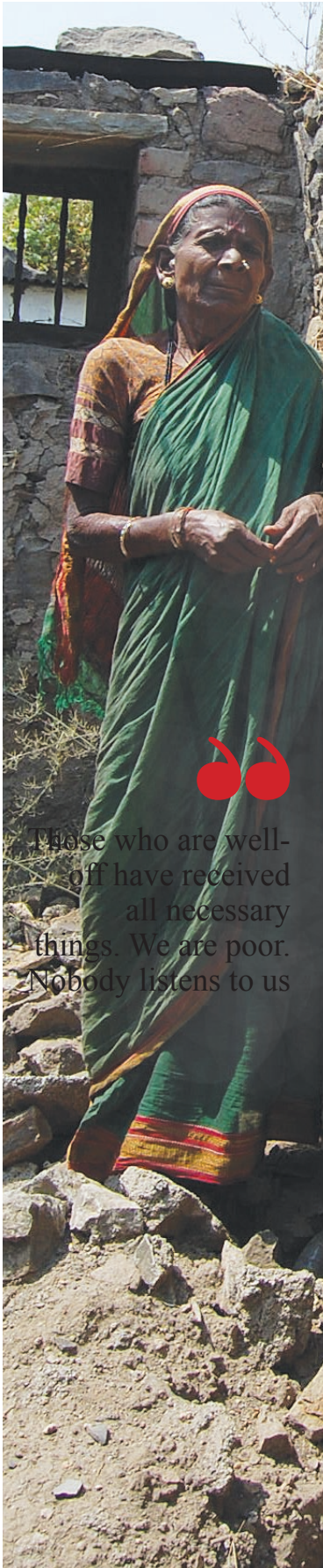
The revised list of items and norms of assistance from Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) and National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) for the period 2005-10 (Ministry of Home Affairs letter no. 32-34/2007-NDM-I dated the 27th June, 2007, modified vide letter no32-31/2009-NDM-I dated 31st July 2009) have compensation amount fixed for every kind of loss -- human, livestock, crops, and other material losses like house, etc. -- based on the Award of the 12th Finance Commission.



However, the following table prepared from the responses speaks volumes for what is happening at the ground level.

Types of losses / damages		Particulars of losses suffered	Entitlements as per CRF norms	Actual benefits received
a. Ex-Gratia payment to the families of deceased persons		Three lives lost	Rs. 1.00 lakh per deceased	NONE received
b. Ex-Gratia payment for loss of a limb or eyes			Rs. 35,000 for disability between 40% - 75% Rs. 50,000 for disability exceeding 75%	Of the 16% of respondents who suffered minor injuries, NONE received relief. The victims spent their own money for medical treatment at private hospitals
c. Grievous injury requiring hospitalization			Rs. 7500/- for more than a week of hospitalization Rs. 2500/- for less than a week of hospitalization	4% of the people received NO compensation
d. Relief for the old, infirm and destitute children			Rs. 20/- per adult per day Rs. 15/- per child per day	Almost each house surveyed had old people and children; but NONE received relief under this norm
e. Clothing and utensils/ household goods for families, whose houses have been washed away/ fully damaged/ severely inundated for more than a week due to a natural calamity		All	Rs. 1000 per family for clothing Rs. 1000 per family for utensils and household goods	Of the 28% respondents, only 4% received Rs 1,000 relief.
f. Gratuitous relief for families in dire need of immediate sustenance after a calamity.			Rs. 20 per adult and Rs. 15 per child per day, for up to 15 days	NONE
g. Supplementary nutrition			Rs. 2 per person per day (as per ICDS standards) for up to 30 days	NONE
h. Agriculture input subsidy where crop loss was 50% and above	For agriculture crops, horticulture crops and annual plantation crops	Loss of standing crops like paddy, sugarcane, maize, and sunflower	Rs. 2000/- per hectare in rainfed areas	The compensation given falls within the range of Rs Rs 1,400 to Rs 4,000 although the number of acres with standing crops destroyed by the floods ranges from 8 acres to 15 acres. This has been the case with 48% of the people.
			Rs. 4,000/- per hectare for areas under assured irrigation.	
			Assistance payable to any small farmer with tiny holding may not be less than Rs.250.	
	Rs 6,000 per hectare for all types of perennial crops.			
Perennial crops			Assistance payable to any small farmer with tiny holding may not be less than Rs. 500/-	

Types of losses / damages	Particulars of losses suffered	Entitlements as per CRF norms	Actual benefits received
i. Replacement of milch animals (Buffalo/ cow etc.)	Loss of buffalo	At the rate of Rs. 10000	Of the 4% who suffered this loss, NONE got relief.
j. Replacement of draught animals (camel/ horse/ bullock, etc.)		At the rate of Rs. 10000	NONE
k. Replacement of Sheep/Goat	Loss of 2-4 sheep	At the rate of Rs. 1000	Of the 16% respondents, NONE got relief under this norm
l. Replacement of calf, donkey and pony		At the rate of Rs. 5000	
m. Replacement of poultry	Loss of 5-10 hens	At the rate of Rs. 30 per bird for up to a ceiling of Rs. 300/-	NO compensation given
n. Provision of fodder / feed concentrate in the cattle camps for large animals		At the rate of Rs. 20 per day for a maximum of 15 days	NONE
o. Provision of fodder / feed concentrate in the cattle camps for small animals		At the rate of Rs. 10 per day, for a maximum of 15 days	NONE
p. Assistance for repair/ restoration of Fully damaged/destroyed pucca house		At the rate of Rs. 25000 per house	Compensation ranging from Rs 1,500-Rs 5000. Only four persons received Rs 37,000
q. Assistance for repair/restoration of Fully damaged/destroyed kutcha house		At the rate of Rs. 10000 per house	Compensation ranging from Rs 1,500-Rs 5000. Only four persons received Rs 37,000. In some cases, the officials demanded refund Rs 32,000
r. Assistance for repair/restoration of severely damaged pucca house		At the rate of Rs. 5000 per house	Up to Rs 5,000 given for 4-5 persons
s. Assistance for repair/restoration of severely damaged kutcha house		At the rate of Rs. 2500 per house	NONE
t. Assistance for repair/restoration of partially damaged pucca/kutcha house (where the damage is minimum of 15 %)		At the rate of Rs. 1500 per house	NONE
u. Assistance for repair/restoration of damaged/ destroyed hut +		At the rate of Rs. 2000 per hut	NONE
v. Immediate relief assistance		As decided by state government	Only 28% of the people received 20 kgs of rice and compensation between Rs 1,500-5,000
w. Employment generation		Payable on demand, one person per affected family to get a minimum of 10 days of employment per month; wages to include 8 kg wheat or 5 kg rice, and the remaining part of minimum wages to be paid in cash	96% of the victims HAVE NOT benefited from this measure



Those who are well-off have received all necessary things. We are poor. Nobody listens to us

3. CASTE BIAS & THE CONSEQUENCES

“IN every matter, whether it was small or big, we have witnessed discrimination at all levels. The upper caste got all the benefits -- be it access to the relief material or proper compensation. We have been completely left out in the rehabilitation efforts,” says Kana-kappa Yallappa Kambale of B K Naad.

Sunil Chalavadi of Jummanal, who has managed to put up a shack with a tarpaulin sheet by the only wall of his collapsed house that is still standing erect, is frustrated with the way things are being handled by the government. As he sits down under the shack; the heat, the dust, and the sweat tell how difficult life can get under the burning sun. As the region swings between extreme weather conditions and the people distressed and exasperated to the limit of their endurance, life limps on even amid flattened houses and maimed spirits.

“All politicians and officials listen to the problems of the upper caste people only and try to solve their problems. Those who are well-off have received all necessary things. We are poor. Nobody listens to us. They have not even made an attempt to understand our problems.”

Many of his Dalit neighbours share Sunil Chalavadi's frustration. When asked if they thought Dalits had not been treated on a par with people from other castes because of caste prejudice, 80% of the respondents said 'yes', while 20% said 'no'.

Similarly, to a question whether they had experienced any discrimination in relief and rehabilitation services in comparison with the dominant caste communities, 76% said 'yes', the rest said 'no'.

a. The plight of women and children

The suffering of the people is evidently beyond any reasonable human endurance. Where to run for cover when the threatening skies portend a storm in monsoon? Where to hide when the searing summer only foretells the disastrous aftermath? How to arrest this downward spiral of poverty and diseases? How to live each rueful day when it inevitably winds up as a frightful night?

Perhaps, not many will dispute the fact it is women whose agony is much deeper and they put up with many more adversities than men. The October floods have only worsened the drudgery of their everyday life. Apart from the duties imposed on them in the name of tradition, they also work along with the menfolk to substitute the family income. They are the ones who toil for hours both at home and in the fields to put together a meal for the family and scamper around to get water and firewood to keep the hearth warm. They also endure the gender bias meted out to them by the dearest ones in particular and the society in general; but still keep going.

The case studies in this report reveal how women, especially those who have lost their houses, are struggling without basic facilities like bathrooms and toilets. The massive floods coupled with hunger and lack of privacy has landed them in a seemingly perpetual mess.

The situation of Dalit women is far worse as their access to the social support system is severely limited, thanks to the caste bias. They are now stuck between two extreme situations: the life that has changed dramatically post floods and the ill-treatment they suffer because of the age-old bias. The caste prejudice has violated their human rights as they have been deprived of suitable compensation and proper rehabilitation.

Responding to a question whether they thought Dalit women had not been treated on a par with women from the upper caste because of caste prejudice, 84% of the women said 'yes' and the rest said 'no'. According to them, the officials were apathetic to their plight soon after the floods as they did not have access to the relief material like clothes, shelter, etc. They have also complained about the lack of medical facilities as no government doctor visited them despite the fact that epidemics broke out a few days after the deluge. Now, almost six months later, they say that not a single government official has visited them to check whether they have basic facilities or not. There have been no special programmes to counsel the traumatised women and children either.

Their children have also been put through unspeakable trauma during and after the deluge. Hunger stalked them then and is unrelenting even now. To a question whether there were instances of their children being left out because of the caste while distributing the relief material; 84% of mothers said yes, 8% said 'no', while the remaining 8% said they were not even aware of the facilities like enough baby food, milk, feeding bottles, baby biscuits, enough warm clothes, napkins and blankets their infants were supposed to get. If this is the case of infants, the situation of their siblings of five years or older, isn't any better. In an atmosphere of fear, destruction, and uncertainty; these tender lives, already of an age that can comprehend the loss, have seen the worst. Having lost schooldays and a normal milieu, so imperative for a happy childhood, these children are growing in an inimical atmosphere.

Financial hardship compounded by lack of employment has been reportedly triggering migration in this area. This kind of displacement not only deprives the children of schooling but also pushes them to the brink of child labour. The fear is, this downward spiral of poverty, rural indebtedness, and displacement triggering migration will only worsen unless concerted efforts are made to arrest the same.



To a question whether there were instances of their children being left out because of the caste while distributing the relief material; 84% of mothers said yes, 8% said 'no'

V

CASE STUDIES**Case study 1**

Dyamava Ravikanth, 25, Arjunagi

“

I lost two children”

WHAT could you possibly ask a woman who has lost two children to the floods and is still waiting for compensation? What kind of questions could possibly capture the predicament that this Dalit woman is in?

This is the difficulty one faces while talking to the 25-year-old Dyamavva Ravikanth of Arjunagi, one of the worst flood-hit villages in Bijapur district. As she settles down under the scorching sun outside her shack, her agony begins to unfold.

The floods encircled her village when she was in the last few days of her second pregnancy. Even as her husband was struggling to shift her to a safer place, the couple saw their little daughter being washed away by the floods. No amount of efforts to save the girl helped as her husband and the villagers were overpowered by the flash floods. A couple of days later, Dyamavva saw the girl's body floating in the stagnant water some miles away from her village. A few days later, she delivered a baby boy only to see the newborn succumb to an undiagnosed illness a few days later.

One can only blame the baby's death on the trauma Dyamavva suffered because of the never-seen-before floods followed by the death of her daughter. Despite all this, Dyamavva knows somehow that the worst isn't yet over.

"The floods washed away my eight-year-old daughter and I lost my second child too. Both my children have left me in pain. I don't know what to live for."

Ask her about how she managed to stay hungry, pat comes a reply: "Don't ask me anything about food. My stomach burns thinking about it even now. I have suffered a lot mentally and physically. I cannot explain in words what it means to lose two children, a house, and everything we had saved for the future. Nobody cared for me. No doctors visited me. I was not given any medicines either."

Dyamavva cannot stop thinking that had she got enough food and proper medical attention in time, her second baby would have probably survived.

As if this was not enough, the local officials are yet to heed her repeated pleas to allot compensation for two deaths in her family. "I have requested them many times to give me the compensation. But I have got nothing so far. I doubt if I ever will."

Almost half a year since the tragedy struck the village, Dyamavva has been lurching from crisis to crisis. "They gave everything to the upper caste people. We did not get anything. Had this happened to an upper caste woman, things would have been different," she says.

According to her, the local officials were reluctant to visit the Dalit colony to assess the damage caused by the floods. When they did visit, they just glanced around casually and scribbled something carelessly on the ledger. "They visited our colony only because we forced them to do so. It was as if they were doing a favour to us. What kind of justice can you expect from all this? We are aware that the entire village has suffered enough for a lifetime. Still, we can clearly see how we have been discriminated."

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“

I have requested them many times to give me the compensation. But I have got nothing so far. I doubt if I ever will

”

Case study 2



Peerappa Madar, 65, Arjunagi (Indi)

“

We suffered more
because we are Dalits

”

WHEN Peerappa Madar took his 60-year-old wife Saakavva, his physically challenged son, and two grandchildren to the sheds put up by the government immediately after the floods, his and many other Dalit families were chased away by the upper caste people. Needless to say, even the most devastating floods could not so much as wipe out an iota of the caste prejudice they had suffered for generations. In fact, according to Peerappa, it was the prime reason why they were left out of the relief and rehabilitation efforts.

“We saw loads of relief material being offloaded from trucks. But the local officials (the tahsildar and the village accountant) made sure that only the upper caste people got it and we were left behind.”

According to him, although the entire village suffered huge losses in the floods, the Dalit families received paltry compensation ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 3,000 apart from five kilos of rice. In contrast, many upper caste families got up to Rs 37,000 as compensation. The situation wasn't any better at the gruel centre either. Since Arjunagi was one of the worst-affected villages in Bijapur district, the centre was run for nearly 15-20 days. Dalits were made to queue up for hours on end while the upper caste people, especially women and children, were given the priority. The plight of Dalit children was even more heart-rending as they had to eat out of their parents' plates and were even reduced to begging.

Having lost his house, savings, and all household belongings, Peerappa's family and his Dalit neighbours seek solace in sharing each other's plight. It was this bonding that saw them through on those fateful days when they were refused entry into temples where the privileged caste people had sought shelter. Like many other Dalits, he is pained by the fact that the local officials refused to note down all their complaints and size up their act. However, he does agree that Dalits were treated on a par with the rest when it came to medical care immediately after the floods to prevent epidemics.

Overwhelmed by the tragedy and anguished over the discrimination, Peerappa's family does not know whom to approach. After much hassle, however, his family was given Rs 3,000 in compensation. Stating that inherent caste bias played an obvious role in distributing relief material as well as fixing the compensation, Peerappa does not mince words when he says “we suffered more because we are Dalits”.

“

We saw loads of relief material being offloaded from trucks. But the local officials (the tahsildar and the village accountant) made sure that only the upper caste people got it and we were left behind

”

Case study 3



Rukmabai Adivappa Chalavadi, 65, Jummanal

“

Neither food,
nor hopes

”

RUKMABAI'S plight can be summed up in a single phrase -- nothing to live on.

In North Karnataka, where the searing sun shows no mercy and droughts recur with unflinching regularity, incessant rains often do not bring solace. Ironically, they are known to play havoc on the people by flattening ripened crops and houses. But this time, the degree of destruction was unprecedented.

Since Jummanal witnessed heavy rains for nearly a month, the villagers were in for a severe shock. Never did Rukmabai think her house would come crashing down right in front of her eyes one day. But it did happen as Jummanal witnessed heavy rains for nearly a month. The rising flood waters submerged her house and shook its foundation. Along with it went those few sacks of jowar and wheat she had saved for future. Her fertile little patch was ravaged by the floods and the crop was washed away in no time. By the time the downpour subsided, the damage was done. It was a heart-to-mouth situation.

Rukmabai and her four children waited for hours hoping that the rain would relent, in vain. Soaked to their bones, they dozed off briefly only to witness the nightmare once they opened their eyes. Damp firewood made life even more difficult as they could not make a fire but had to be content with half-cooked food.

Life wasn't kind earlier either with poverty gnawing at Rukmabai. She worked hard to feed her children by collecting fodder for the village headman (Gowda). To supplement her income, she also worked as a farm labourer.

"I have gone through a lot of pain in life and it isn't over yet. Our main income comes from our field but now, we have lost a crop too. We don't know how to live on like this."

Things are now unreasonably difficult with Rukmabai's family not being considered for compensation by the government. "The local officials demand a part of the compensation first and then tell us how much we are going to get. They are both corrupt and casteist. Whenever we prevailed upon them, they kept fobbing us off saying 'you haven't given your name, you won't get compensation.'"

"Because of our caste, we weren't given shelter. There was no gruel centre here, nor were we given any medicines. I could not send my young girl children to sleep in the shelter as it was being used by the youths of other castes," she adds.

She hasn't got any relief for the crop loss either. "We have not got any relief for crop loss. We haven't heard anything about rehabilitation yet."

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“

Have gone through a lot of pain in life and it isn't over yet. Our main income comes from our field but now, we have lost a crop too. We don't know how to live on like this

”

Case study 4



Shivamma Andappa Doddamani, 75, Arjunagi,

“We feel left out”

HER family worked for months to grow tur dal and jowar in her four-acre strip and thought the fruits of their labour had arrived home when they unloaded the harvested crop at their doorstep. But it took just a few hours to wipe out months of perseverance. Seventy-five-year-old Shivamma Andappa Doddamani of Arjunagi could hardly think of shifting the sacks to a safer place when she was struggling to pull herself out of her house which had caved in. She cried her heart out as she could hardly move. Her grandson rescued her and her entire family took shelter in a neighbouring pucca house that withstood the fury of the floods.

“For all the agony we have suffered after losing four acres of crops and a house, we have got only Rs 1,500 as compensation. This is not what we should get for working so hard. We could not save anything as we had no safe place to store them. Who would listen to this old woman, tell me?” she cries.

Shivamma, a devadasi and a mother of three, used to work as a sweeper in the village. Her eldest son works as a farm labourer; two younger children pursued education and one of them is a schoolteacher. Despite difficulties, the family was able to eke out a decent living.

But once the deluge hit her village, she saw everyone scrambling for safety and running around for food and safe drinking water. “There were a couple of gruel centres. But we did not go there because we were told they (the upper caste people) were cooking for themselves.”

Narrating how the Dalit families in her village felt excluded from the relief operations, she adds: “They erected sheds only for the upper caste people. When we went there, they fought with us and chased us out. The officials clearly discriminated us on the basis of caste.”

Shivamma, having lived her entire life in Jummanal, can clearly see how life has changed dramatically; and on the contrary, how the age-old prejudice against Dalits has deepened. “We are living in an atmosphere of fear. We have been living like this ever since we lost our house, crops, and everything that once belonged to us.... The government hasn’t done one bit to mitigate the crisis. We feel completely left out from the scheme of things.”

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“

There were a couple of gruel centres. But we did not go there because we were told they (the upper caste people) were cooking for themselves

”

Case study 5



Husenawa P Chowdekar, 35, Thonasihal

“

There's only corruption,
nothing else

”

WHAT began as a drizzle turned furious with the ominous clouds pouring down on Thonasi-hal in October 2009. Husenavva, whose hut was perching perilously on the river bank, did not know how to save her belongings, leave alone her hut. She stood helplessly when the rising water washed away her past. In a few moments, she was reduced to penury.

Husenavva knows what it means to live through extreme situations. She moved on even when her husband, an inveterate drunkard, sold their five-acre land and rendered the family penniless. She worked hard as a farm labourer and tried to put the thread of life intact. But, this time, the tragedy was beyond human endurance.

“It kept pouring for days. We hoped that it would subside but it only got worse,” she says.

Initially, her kachcha house withstood the damage. However, as the downpour persisted, stone slabs started coming apart. “We had no place to shift the pulses filled in sacks.”

With her two children, she put together the scattered stone slabs and built a fragile shelter. “It can collapse any day,” she says.

Once out of her temporary shelter, Husenavva is up against a deep-rooted anti-Dalit prejudice. She tells how difficult it was to get a few meals at the gruel centre set up as an emergency measure soon after the floods receded. Now, her fight for suitable compensation is beginning to seem futile with the local officials demanding bribe for every little ‘favour’. “When we ask for compensation, they tell us that they cannot find our names on the list.”

However, the mystery behind the missing names seems to be an obvious fallout of caste-based discrimination in Thonasihal. “Some people in the village have got compensation. But we Dalits haven’t received anything from the government.”

Tired of running from pillar to post to get what is rightfully hers, Husenavva cannot help criticising how the government officials have turned a deaf ear to their complaints. “Despite the fact that many houses got submerged by the floods, the government hasn’t built any sheds here. There is only corruption and nothing else.”

XXXXX

“
It kept pouring for
days. We hoped that
it would subside but
it only got worse
”

Case study 6



Sharanappa Kallappa Madyal, 80, Salutagi (Indi)

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In a scary
twilight zone

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FOR 80-year-old Sharanappa Kallappa Madyal of Salutagi (Indi), the twilight zone just got scarier. With his 75-year-old wife, this Dalit has met with the worst crisis of his life and what more, is yet to come to grips with it.

In Salutagi, all the kachcha houses owned by Dalits have collapsed and a majority of them have lost everything. Post-floods, the couple could not get a meal as they could not jostle their way through the crowd gathered around the gruel centre. With their lone married daughter living elsewhere, no one in the village cared to check on the couple's plight.

The situation isn't any better now. A quick glance at the shelter and you know the misery the couple are going through. With only one wall of their collapsed house still standing erect, the couple are taking shelter by the wall. Hard of hearing and with blurred vision, the old man seeks help from his son-in-law to get each question right. Not able to seek help from relatives, they have been living in this damaged, unliveable house. They have little food, no clothes to wear. In fact, no one pays attention to their existence. Nobody seems to have basic human concern about this old couple, how they are living in such trying times. The government officials haven't even bothered to allot relief. "We did not even get the emergency relief kit (comprising pulses, sugar, oil, and other things)," says the old man.

The local officials, although aware of the situation of the Dalits in the village, have not cared to build temporary sheds in this village; not even in extreme cases like this old couple who can hardly move out of their shack.

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“

We did not even get the emergency relief kit (comprising pulses, sugar, oil, and other things)

”

Case study 7



Nagamma Krishnappa Doddamani, 46, Jummanal

(Second from left)

“

I feel like
committing suicide

”

“I am tired of this life. I feel like committing suicide.”

This is how 46-year-old Nagamma Krishnappa Doddamani of Jummanal describes her agony of having lived through the worst tragedy of her life.

Namma and her family were sleeping in their kachcha house when the downpour started beating down on her house. The entire family rushed out of it when a huge stone slab fell right next to her.

“I had a house and it collapsed following rains. I haven’t seen such a frightening downpour in my life. It’s a miracle that we are still alive. I prayed to every god to protect us from this hellish experience.”

They took shelter in a neighbour’s house for a day and later shifted to Dalit community temple. “We cooked some food as there was no gruel centre set up in our village. It was painful to see hungry children soaking in the rain.”

Ask her about how life was once the floods subsided, she says things turned even more difficult as the pulses and rice they salvaged from the collapsed house had dwindled and they did not have a shelter or enough blankets to help their children sleep. Sleepless nights spent on empty stomachs are what Nagamma says she would remember for life.

“There are no temporary sheds, nor any rehabilitation efforts to shift us out of this mess. We have been reduced to streets. I feel as if somebody is stamping on my stomach.”

Being aware of the blatant bias against the untouchables going on for generations does not make things any easier while living through a tragedy of such monumental proportions. Nagamma speaks at length of how the local officials refused to visit the Dalit colony to assess the damage. “They came only after much persuasion and even force. Anybody can say what kind of losses we have suffered but many of us received only Rs 1500 as compensation. We have no food items, no medicines, nothing. But who cares?”

Although this anti-Dalit attitude is not shocking since it is so well entrenched into the social system and is now being treated as a way of life, Nagamma still cannot believe how any human being, having seen such a catastrophe, could refuse to acknowledge the plight of another human being.

“I have had so many fights with the village accountant and each time he tried to pounce on me. We Dalits did not get the facilities that the upper caste people did. When my children, grandchildren fell sick, I had to shell out my own money to get them some medicines. There were no doctors; nobody else to check on us. We have suffered discrimination in every possible way because we are ‘Madigas’,” Nagamma says.

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“

There are no temporary sheds, nor any rehabilitation efforts to shift us out of this mess. We have been reduced to streets. I feel as if somebody is stamping on my stomach

”

Case study 8



**Siddhappa Shankarappa Bhavimani, 31,
Shirashyad**

(First from left)

“

Help us for
humanity's sake

”

WHAT'S striking about Siddhappa is his clarity of thought and straightforward replies. He does not mince words, nor is he afraid of anybody. He knows that he is a Dalit and that caste-based discrimination is its natural corollary. But he is not ready to give up his fight.

A father of three children, he has lost his house and two sheep and 10 hens that were washed away by the floods. "There has been blatant discrimination in fixing the compensation and the entire village knows about this. I had to wish away Rs 500 as bribe out of the Rs 1500 given to me as compensation. Otherwise, the local officials would have made sure that my name was deleted from their list. Some upper caste people got up to Rs 37,000 even though their houses suffered minimal damages like wall collapse."

Siddhappa had a harrowing time shifting his old parents, wife, and children to the Dalit community centre as their efforts to seek shelter in the upper caste temple and the primary school turned futile. "Once our house collapsed, we rushed to our community centre and lived there for over a month. It was very crowded and there was not enough space to sleep or even stretch our legs. However, none of us were allowed into the upper caste temple and the school for caste reasons. Although all of us were going through the worst ever tragedy in our lives, they were as heartless as ever."

Siddhappa and his Dalit neighbours faced a similar situation when the government set up a gruel centre in the village. "The entire relief operation was managed by the upper caste people. They were the ones overseeing the ganji kendra (gruel centre) activities. Naturally, they made sure that their wives and children were served enough food and the Dalits had to be content with leftovers. This has hurt us deeply. They did not care if our children were crying or dying of hunger."

Since the devastation was widespread, epidemics broke out in Shirashyad immediately after the rains subsided. Despite its sizeable population, it lacks a primary healthcare centre. "We did not see a single government doctor visiting our colony although many contagious diseases were spreading rapidly. Dead animals were rotting in the slush and our colony was literally unliveable. But none of these mattered to the government officials here. There were no efforts to ensure proper sanitation and safe drinking water."

Even after almost six months since the devastation, there is no talk about rehabilitating the flood victims to a safer place. According to Siddhappa, although the entire village faced the fury of the floods, the upper caste people were able to withstand the agony as they got all kinds of support -- food, clothes, and compensation.

"Our village accountant and the secretary belong to the upper caste. We are not surprised by the fact that the Dalits were kept out of the scheme of things when relief operations were underway. We have been facing this contempt for generations. Still, being humans, we would expect them to forget their caste bias for a while and help us cope with the crisis for humanity's sake. We are not asking for much; but only what is rightfully ours."

XXXXX

“

The entire relief operation was managed by the upper caste people. They were the ones overseeing the ganji kendra (gruel centre) activities. Naturally, they made sure that their wives and children were served enough food and the Dalits had to be content with leftovers

”

Case study 9



Ramesh, 35, Kotyala, Bijapur taluk

“

Dalit GP chairman
is under pressure

”

“THEY promised us that we would be given the keys to the new house on Ugadi. They have not even started construction here,” says Ramesh who has been waiting to get out of his makeshift tent ever since the floods rendered him homeless.

Though hopeful of getting a decent shelter sometime in future, Ramesh cannot help pointing at the discriminatory attitude of the local officials. He says an elevated land has been marked off for building houses for the upper caste while the Dalit houses are set to come up in a low-lying area.

Unlike in other villages surveyed by the team where the officialdom belonged predominantly to the upper caste people, Kotyala boasts a Dalit Gram Panchayat chairman. “This has not helped us one bit. In fact, each time we approach him for facilities, we sense that he is hesitating and is afraid of something. We don’t know if he is under pressure from someone else. But nothing has been done for Dalits so far.”

This speaks volumes for how the caste system put in place for centuries can easily thwart the efforts of the underprivileged to exercise their rights and hope for a better life.

According to Ramesh, the caste bias cut so deep that it was visible in every aspect of the relief operations.

“There were two queues in front of the ganji Kendra (gruel centre) -- one for the upper caste and the other for the Dalits. Most often, we returned hungry because the upper caste were given the first priority. We saw this happening even when our children were ill and crying for food.”

He also says that the officials received loads of food items, utensils, blankets, clothes, etc. “None of it reached the needy people, especially the Dalits. The local officials have hoarded the entire stock in their houses. There is nobody to question them.”

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In fact, each time we approach him for facilities, we sense that he is hesitating and is afraid of something. We don’t know if he is under pressure from someone else. But nothing has been done for Dalits so far

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VI

CONCLUSION

THIS survey, based on the responses by the flood-hit victims of North Karnataka and direct observation of the surveyors, has led to certain broad conclusions.

Some of these conclusions reinforce widely reported observations in the media. Some others have been influenced by the first-hand reports and personal observations of the surveyors.

Since the scale of destruction was unprecedented, the area that came under the attack was significantly large, and also the size of the population that bore the brunt of the tragedy was in millions, some discrepancies like the inability of the officials concerned to control the chaos that broke out during distribution of emergency relief material have been overlooked.

However, the following are the key areas that demand immediate attention.

Compensation has been the major aspect of the flood relief management criticised to a great extent by the respondents. Although people of all castes have expressed dissatisfaction over the measly compensation distributed for house damage and crop loss; once again, the Dalit population has been at the receiving end, thanks to the brazen discrimination.

The main reasons behind this dissatisfaction are lack of proper survey of Dalit colonies, lack of scientific and professional assessment of the damage caused by the floods, and of course, large-scale corruption especially at the local level. Hence, 92% of the Dalits answered 'no' when asked if they received suitable compensation as against only 8% who replied in the affirmative.

To mitigate the crisis, the State Government must first focus on proper surveys of the Dalit colonies and scientific assessment of the damage carried out with the help of experts. Secondly, the government machinery should work towards improving the living conditions in the temporary sheds by providing basic amenities until the affected population is either shifted to newly built shelters in a safer area or is given suitable compensation as specified under the norms of assistance from Calamity Relief Fund & National Calamity Contingency Fund so that they are encouraged to spring back to life.

Similarly, it is of utmost importance to rein in the corrupt officials at all levels to ensure that the flood-hit Dalit population does not continue to be victimised. Equally important is the need to devise methods to generate employment. This can have many positive effects: it will contain poverty and indebtedness to an extent and arrest distress migration. As a result, children continue to go to school and child labour will also be under control.

One possible argument could be that people of all castes and religions have suffered equally and that the issues of Dalits cannot be looked at with special focus. However,

innumerable incidents of discrimination point a finger at the age-old prejudice against

The main reasons behind this dissatisfaction is lack of proper survey of Dalit colonies, lack of scientific and professional assessment of the damage caused by the floods, and of course, large-scale corruption especially at the local level

the Dalit population. Violation of human rights is going on by denying them suitable compensation for deaths, house and crop losses, shelter, and rehabilitation. In all fairness, the government must ensure that victimisation of this historically disadvantaged section of the society does not continue just because the privileged population shared their plight in certain ways. Or else, it will call into question the rhetoric about the protection of human rights while highlighting the futility of keeping fundamental faith in human progress alive.



The following five articles published by *India Together* were written by **Savita Hiremath**. She visited six flood-hit villages of Koppal and Bellary districts in November 2009

2 | KARNATAKA SECOND CRISIS AFTER FIRST

Devastated by floods, but drowned by corruption

The North Karnataka's flood victims feel that it was relatively easier to run away from the raging waters than dealing now with a corrupt bureaucracy and eking out a livelihood fraught with imponderables. **Savita Hiremath** investigates.

6 December 2009 - Hunger dehumanises, and so does the corrupt system

Ever since the worst floods in recent memory left them homeless, thousands of victims in Koppal and Bellary districts are battling against corruption, shoddy rehabilitation, and harassment from the officials concerned. All this after they lay marooned for over 24-30 hours without food, hung on grimly under the pounding rain, and watched helplessly their houses and crops being washed away by the floods.

It all began on September 30 and went on till October 2 with torrential rains leaving North Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh devastated. In North Karnataka alone, over 229 people lost their lives and thousands are now seeking shelter in relief camps. The Karnataka government sources say that 6.55 lakh houses have collapsed; 7,882 livestock perished; 4,292 villages have been affected in 75 taluks across 14 districts, of which 346 villages need complete rehabilitation. In all, 400 schools and 1,050 anganwadis have been washed away, and 3,000 more schools severely damaged.

According to the Karnataka Agriculture Department, it was a double whammy as some parts of the north Karnataka were reeling under drought prior to the floods and sowing could not be undertaken in 1.66 lakh hectares (only 69.68 lakh was sown as against 71.34 lakh hectares last year). Now, the region has lost standing crops in 22 lakh hectares of land to the floods. As far sugarcane, one of the main crops of the area, the loss is estimated to be worth at least Rs.500 crores (Business Standard, Nov 03).

As an emergency relief measure soon after the floods, the state government announced 25 kgs of rice, 10 kgs of wheat, 2 kgs of pulses and 5 kgs of sugar, and five litres of kerosene and edible oil to each affected family and also promised to relocate the 346 submerged villages to safer places.

Yet, the worst is far from over.



SAVITA HIREMATH

A ruined house in Kakkaragol of Koppal district. Even this scale of damage has fetched its owner Rs.4,000-7000 of compensation only.

Relief operations gone haywire

LISTEN to a frustrated Ubalesh, 28, Shridharagadde of Siruguppa taluk, who now lives with fellow-villagers in a shifted plot dotted with 230 sheds, his account of the tragedy tells you what a travesty of justice this entire relief operation has been turned into.

“The district commissioner had assured us enough rice. But most often, only some of us get it and the rest return empty-handed. The local officials say that they are rationing out all the rice they have in stock systematically. The government has ordered that three meals a day be given for three months. But the ganji kendra (gruel centre) was shut down right after 15-20 days. We now get one meal a day from the midday meal scheme on first-come-first-serve basis. If we lag behind, we are sure to go hungry.”

Having witnessed the destruction firsthand in Bijapur district, Basavaraj Kowtal, convener of Human Rights Front for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka (HRFDL-K), argues that the state government has completely failed to put in place effective measures to ensure proper relief operations. He blames it on its “poor commitment and ill-preparedness”. “The government is saying that 11,000 gruel centres have been set up - it’s all a lie. In many cases, there was only one centre for 2-3 villages. The government even announced a milk powder sachet worth 2 rupees a day for children and that has not been implemented either.”

Fixing and distribution of relief funds has been so arbitrary and ham-handed that only a few have received over Rs.25,000 as compensation while the rest have to be content with Rs.5,000-7,000. Many more who are being fobbed off by the officials. People in Hachholli of Siruguppa and Hiresindhogi of Koppal district say that although the money is supposed to be withdrawn without any hassle through a no-frill account, the officials were demanding bribe ranging from Rs.150-1,000 to process the cheques.

“There is neither a scientific approach nor social concern or justice in planning the operations. Some have got relief as low as Rs.1,500 and others Rs.37000.... Even with this amount, how are they going to build a house? They will need at least Rs.1.5 lakh to build a decent mud house,” adds Kotwal.

Conflicting statements from officials

ADMITTING that “some level of funds mismanagement was going on”, Koppal Taluk Tahsildar P N Lokesh, who is personally overseeing the relief operations in the worst-affected Hiresindhogi, rules out large-scale corruption. “I am aware of such mismanagement and just now booked a criminal case against a village accountant who had cheques drawn in his wife’s and children’s names.”

Lokesh adds that such bungling happened in the beginning but has been under control ever since a four-member team was set up to monitor the relief efforts. However, when mentioned that people themselves were unaware of any such survey and that no such official was seen during this writer’s visit to Hiresindhogi in the second week of November (almost 45 days after the floods), he sticks to his guns saying, “The survey has been going on and we are now distributing Rs.37,000 to each such house-owner.”



SAVITA HIREMATH

Malleshappa Hugar of Hiresindhogi, Koppal district, in front of his collapsed house.

Sirupuppa Tahsildar Geetha N R, who assumed charge only in the third week of November, too has booked a case against a village accountant on similar charges and adds that she opened a separate counter for those people who complained of improper survey and received 16,000 fresh applications in a matter of two weeks. "But we have to verify if these cases are genuine and then the DC has to approve them."

Conversely, Koppal Deputy Commissioner Sathyamurthy brushes aside any allegation of corruption. "People are misleading the media and the district administration as well", he counters. "Every time they say the survey is wrong which is incorrect. Instead of one, I have constituted a team of four senior officials.... Based on their survey, cheques worth Rs.48 crores have gone to the deserving people."

When told that his statement contradicts the Tahsildar's admission that village accountants and panchayat secretaries are indulging in blatant corruption, the DC says: "They have been threatened of severe punishment. The press, the Lokayukta, and the senior officials have pulled them up them so badly that they have had enough of it."

When reasoned that there was no question of censuring them unless they were in the wrong, Sathyamurthy reply turned evasive: "We are doing our best to ensure that compensation goes to rightful people. See, people aren't that easy. They will get all wrong things written by you."

When I visited Hiresindhogi, Kakkaragol, Halegondabalu of Koppal district and Shridharagadde, Hachcholli, and Kudadaral in Siruguppa taluk of Bellary district in the second week of November, complaints over bribing the officials for each 'favour' were common. Incidentally, not even one village accountant or panchayat secretary was available for comments.

The worst-hit got the least

SAYS an eloquent Shamil of SC/ST colony, Hachcholli: "Those who suffered the worst were given only 5,000 rupees. But some rich landlords whose houses are intact got 30-35 thousand rupees. Some houses have even received 4-5 cheques. It's all because of political pressure. The entire relief operation has been so disorderly. Those who could force their way in got everything and the rest have to fend for themselves."

The situation in Hiresindhogi, which Chief Minister Yeddyurappa visited, is no better. Hanumavva Shahapur in her late 70s says it's been the worst crisis of her life: "They want a cut in everything - be it kerosene, rice, relief material, or compensation amount." Her neighbour Yamunappa is still angry that they took back his cheque worth Rs.4,500 and issued a new one after deducting Rs.1000.

Crop insurance

WHILE the hapless victims starve and tax is being laid on the urban population to shore up funds, the entire relief operation is at the mercy of these few officials and their whims.

Malleshappa Hugar, 50, says the officials walked around casually on his damaged cotton, rice, chilli, and maize fields and handed over a cheque amounting to Rs.800 for each acre. "The government order says that each farmer be given Rs 2,000-2,500 as relief per

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We are doing our best to ensure that compensation goes to rightful people. See, people aren't that easy. They will get all wrong things written by you

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acre. When we raise our voice, these officials tell us to meet higher officials. They spend thousands on food and liquor in restaurants and dole out only 800 rupees for all the work I have done with my wife and children for months.”

Tahsildar Lokesh once again admits that the officials were inexperienced to assess the crop damage and hence says, “We have requested our higher officials to delegate this work to either the agriculture or the horticulture or the watershed department”.

Ration cards

That they are alive even after the evil tidings ruined their houses is no small a miracle for these people. Their first terrified impulse was to grab whatever they could and run for cover. Yet, when they knock on the fair price shop for rice and oil, they are told to show their ration cards. Manjunath, 15, studying 10th , Hiresindhogi, says: “When we tell them that the ration card was washed away in the floods, they say ‘what can we do? If you want rice and kerosene, you have to show the card’.”

There is not a single row of house that has not been ruined by the floods. However, none of this seems to prick the conscience of the babus. “We are aware that crores of rupees have been set aside for relief operations. But if these officials can’t even understand how much we need for rebuilding our houses, it’s as good as we are dead,” adds Malleshappa.

A thousand little cuts

The conflicting official statistics and statements contradict the victims’ versions and the first-hand accounts of the outsiders. But one thing stands irrefutable: that it’s the responsibility of the system to set things right and no amount of subterfuge can ever conceal it; that such a system robs people off their finest human qualities and lets them die by a thousand little cuts.

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When we tell them that the ration card was washed away in the floods, they say ‘what can we do? If you want rice and kerosene, you have to show the card

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3 | DISASTER RELIEF IN KARNATAKA

Everybody loves a good flood

Sloppy and biased surveys of damaged houses and paltry compensation have made the flood victims in Koppal and Bellary districts run from pillar to post to get what is rightfully theirs, writes **Savita Hiremath**

12 December 2009 - When all hell breaks loose, make merry.

THIS is exactly what some flood victims in Koppal district resorted to once they were distributed compensation for 'partially' damaged houses - not because it was plenty, but too paltry to be put to good use. In the worst-hit Hachchholli of Bellary district, many poor people hit arrack shops or gambled away the relief fund. Paradoxically, amid its ruins stands a wine shop - all intact.

Says Shailaja H M, president of Sanjogita Women and Rural Development Organisation, Koppal taluk: "Our NGO chipped in for the relief work in Hachchholli and I talked to many men who had frittered away the relief money on drinking or gambling as Deepavali was round the corner. They said how can we repair the house with 3000 rupees?"

When I visited some flood-hit villages perching perilously on the rain-swollen Tungabhadra and Hagari riverbanks, I came close to understanding why these men took refuge in such acts with impunity. Their mud houses couldn't have withstood even a fairly heavy rain; forget the pounding that went on from September 30 to October 2. The mud melted, the wooden posts collapsed, and the houses caved in. All this happened when the people were hobbling along with their children and old parents to the other edge of their small world. Karnataka Government sources say that 22 villages (5,611 families) in Koppal district and 20 villages (6,800 families) in Bellary district have been marked out for relocation.

The root cause

FOR all the destruction in many villages of Koppal, Tahsildar P N Lokesh blames it on the nearby Hirehalla checkdam with six crest gates which has no monitoring cell. He says thousands of cusecs of water are released without any prior notice or precaution causing a lot of damage in this area. "Earlier the dam was 20 feet deep, but now it is almost at ground-level because of silt and garbage. No desilting project has been taken up for long. Lokesh says he has talked to the zilla panchayath to employ people under NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) to desilt the checkdam. "This will ensure employment to the



SAVITA HIREMATH

Cooking must go on even in this messed-up, roofless kitchen in Hiresindhogi of Koppal district.

flood-hit and prevention of crop damage in future.”

Biased survey

IN all the six villages I visited (Hachholli, Halegondabalu, Kakkaragol, Hiresindhogi, Kudadaral, and Shridharagadde) across Koppal and Bellary districts in second week of November, one thread stood out persistently from among a string of grievances raised by the victims. They complained that the survey conducted days after the tragedy was biased and slipshod. Both local- and taluk-level officials did not even bother to enter and take a look into the so-called partially damaged houses. Sometimes whimsical, often deliberate, they scribbled a number on the cheque cavalierly and handed it over to the victims. The rich got a better deal; whereas the poor feel that the bureaucrats’ chilling disregard is rooted in the inherent prejudice that those who live in huts and on the fringes do not deserve anything better.

Lokesh admits that the local officials sat down in temples or gram panchayat offices or in some prominent persons’ houses and fixed the relief amount. “In all, 1,167 houses were given cheques in Hiresindhogi. We halted that survey and conducted a new one to rectify the mistakes....”

The state government entrusted village accountants and secretaries with the task of damage assessment. Questioning the futility of such methodology, Basavaraj Kowtal, convenor of Human Rights Front for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka, says: “What’s the purpose of these repeated surveys when there is no engineer or expert to assess the damage? How can a village accountant or a secretary be entrusted with this job?”

Fearing that this entire rehabilitation exercise might drag on for many years, Kowtal regrets that the government went ahead with the relief operations without preparedness or commitment. “Only favouritism and nepotism work - I have myself come across many examples.”

Professor T R Chandrashekhar of Hampi Kannada University, who led a seven-member team of scholars and research assistants to study the nature and consequences of floods, says he noticed a great deal of uncertainty with regard to resettlement and “nobody knows how it will end”. He regrets that all the operations are being carried out without consulting the people.

When his team approached the district administration with this concern, they said people would demand too much “if we let them speak and so we are doing it on our own”. While agreeing that such a scenario is possible, Chandrashekhar says the government cannot throw the baby with the bathwater. “I can’t argue that the rich should get more relief and the poor less. But the government cannot escape its responsibilities. It has to evolve some mechanism like bank loan schemes to solve the problems.”



SAVITA HIREMATH

Neelamma, 80, keeps a watch on monkeys and strays in front of her damaged house in Kakkaragol of Koppal district.

Measly compensation

At Halegondabalu of Koppal, where, out of the 580 houses, 143 were completely submerged and another 300 severely damaged, Somavva, 70, says she cooks in someone else’s house because the mud roof of her house has caved in. Since only the outer walls are still standing upright, the officials termed it “partially damaged” and gave her Rs. 7,000. Ashok, 25, a B.Sc.

graduate of the same village, says his house wasn't surveyed even after 45 days after the floods. "Our house has fallen and there is water inside. We sleep in someone else's house."

Even more shocking is the Rs.500-1,500 given to some people, especially dalits, in Bijapur. Ramesh, member of Bijapura Shoshithara Abhivridhi Vedike (a newly constituted forum to fight discrimination against flood-hit dalits), rues, "Some people here got just 500 rupees. The officials behave as if they are doing it out of pity and we are made to look like beggars."

Kowtal questions the very basis on which the government fixed Rs.35,000-37,000 relief for pucca houses and Rs. 4,000-7,000 for kachcha houses. "It clearly shows how discriminatory the officials have been. Better houses for rich people and some shacks for the poor - this attitude violates the basic human rights." He argues that if the government says six lakh houses have collapsed, it should give equal compensation to all - be it upper caste or Dalits. "It's just that they don't have the heart to give. That's all."

On the contrary, Siruguppa tahsildar Geetha N R claims that people pulled down their own houses to get full compensation. Kowtal dismisses this statement and calls it nonsense. "Aren't people going about their lives without all this compensation or decent shelters? People will move on somehow; it has always been so, it is so even now. They aren't foolish enough to bring down their own houses and wait for the government to rebuild them."

Ironically, claiming "swift relief action and massive reconstruction" in its Report to People-1 - "Unprecedented Floods" - dated December 6, the Karnataka government says that 6.55 lakh houses have been wiped out but makes no mention of the partially damaged houses.

Is the damage 'partial' or the bureaucracy?

EXPERTISE to assess the damage is important, but in fact, it needs a casual glance to comprehend the sordid state of affairs. In some kachcha houses, either the roof has come crashing down or the façade or the walls. In front of these unliveable houses, old women keeping a watch on strays and monkeys was a common sight in Kakkaragol of Koppal, a village which was preparing for the chief minister's visit.

In the meantime, most of the RCC buildings - generally very few and owned by well-to-do families - have withstood the floods and are at least in liveable conditions.

Shivamma and Neelamma, both in their 80s, have lived in Kakkaragol all their life but are now finding it difficult to live in their (kachcha) houses. "God knows our plight.... We are so scared to sit and eat food inside the house. The back wall and the side walls are gone. We don't know when it will fully collapse." Her neighbour Neelamma echoes the concern: "it is so frightening whenever it rains these days. We don't know what will happen next."

As I walked through one slitty lane after another, men and women led me to their houses saying: "When it rains, the entire house leaks. We don't have enough blankets or mats. How are we to live on here with old parents and children till they shift us?"

While breast-feeding her 10-month-old baby, Gangamma, 33, Hiresindhogi, says: "they said they would give 35,000 rupees for fallen houses. But we have received only 4,000-5,000 rupees. All of them (politicians) make speeches. They tell us that they cannot survive

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It's just that they don't have the heart to give. That's all

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without us growing crops. Now we are being pushed out of our village in the name of rehabilitation. When we complain, they advise that we should ask for compensation. Are we beggars? Don't we have self-respect?"

Kowtal isn't at all ready to buy into this theory of partial damage. These mud houses are extremely fragile because most of them do not have a sound foundation. The walls may be standing upright now but one rain is enough to bring them down. The entire structure needs to be razed and rebuilt all over again. "Even for temporary repairs, 35,000 rupees is not enough."

After consulting some victims in Bijapur district and engineers, HRFDL submitted a memorandum to the Legal Services Authority in the Karnataka High Court in the last week of November. They estimate the cost of building a decent mud house at Rs 1.5 lakh. "If not, we have demanded that the government should give a minimum of Rs.80,000 for repair works," adds Kowtal

In one such house in Hiresindhogi, I saw a huge heap of mud and broken wooden posts lay right next to the fireplace. While various kinds of creepers meandered all over the damaged roof, a swarm of butterflies were fluttering merrily over the bright yellow flowers. Ironically, none of these flowers or butterflies stood in tribute to the past. Everything that was so familiar had turned so hostile! Unless one is forced to live under these circumstances, it is difficult to fathom what it means to be homeless. Partially homeless, that is.

Maybe, 'heart-wrenching' is the word that captures the pain of seeing Sarojamma, 54, of Hiresindhogi, a widow with two young daughters who has fallen sick after the floods. Humbled and famished, her family now sleeps in her relatives' house. She says she has nothing to live on and that the officials gave her only 4000 rupees. She breaks down: "I am not someone who has the courage to question anyone. I won't ask anybody for anything. If it comes, good. Otherwise I will convince myself that I have sinned against someone and hence being punished."

Behind her frail appearance lie an irreducible faith in the divinity and a stubbornness that no floods can wash away; nor can the officials, smug as they may be in their reprehensible deeds, dent her grace.

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We have demanded that the government should give a minimum of Rs.80,000 for repair works

4 | KARNATAKA FLOOD RELIEF

The unkindest cut of all

Post October floods in North Karnataka, Dalits find themselves in a greater predicament. A century of struggle for equal rights and worse, fundamental faith in human progress, is at stake, writes **Savita Hiremath**

24 December 2009 - On September 30,

hours dragged by and the black shadow of calamity brooded over Hachcholli of Koppal taluk. People looked up into the sky heavy with scudding clouds and misled themselves into thinking that it would be just another downpour. A day later, they were in the midst of an unprecedented tragedy as the rain-swollen Tungabhadra and Hagari rivers swept mercilessly everything that came in their way.

They now know what it means to have houses submerged, fertile fields stripped, bales of cotton soiled, sacks of rice soaked, cattle dead, and women and children turned to starve.

A ghastly trip home

ONCE the waters receded, it was a ghastly trip home. For some there was no trace of home at all, just a clean sweep of the past. Once the government launched emergency relief measures and installed some sheds, things began to fall in place - caste was the first priority. Although there was no semblance of order or discipline while distributing food and relief material, isolation of Dalits was achieved with utmost urgency and sincerity. The fringes were neatly delineated and that's where they were sent back again.

"In some villages, they weren't even allowed to take shelter in temples and schools," says Basavaraj Kowtal, convenor of Human Rights Front for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka.

This segregation came easy in Hachcholli. Post 1992 floods, a sizable SC/ST population was housed in sheds put up a kilometre away from the village. This time the rest of the Dalits were told to move in with others. This distance has cost them dear. A huge portion of relief material reached the upper caste, well-to-do families while 300-400 families living on the periphery remained unaware of the goings-on.

Marthamma (50) rues that relief material including plates, tumblers, blankets, lanterns, and kerosene stove didn't even reach them. "Only some NGOs helped us. Officials do not



SAVITA HIREMATH

A Dalit in front his house in Kakkaragol of Koppal taluk.

visit us. Even if they come, they just talk to some people at the entrance and go back.”

Gruel centres

When I visited Hachcholli and Shridharagadde of Bellary 45 days after the floods, casteist politics at gruel centres (ganji kendra) was striking. With the curtain of prejudice keeping them automatically away from the overcrowded centres; invariably, it was the dalits who returned hungry.

Kowtal, who toured worst-hit Bijapur district, says nowhere did he come across a single centre set up in a Dalit colony. The officials set up one centre for 2-3 villages and none for Dalits despite being aware that casteism is intense in villages. “The possibility of Dalits eating food with the rest simply does not exist. In Kowligi (Bijapur), Dalits were told to get their own plates although they had none. Even hungry children weren’t spared.”

Survey based on 1992 records

The bias cuts so deep that in Anjotigi of Indi taluk, 25-30 Dalits are living in only five sheds of 10x10 dimensions. Life inside is far beyond any reasonable endurance. These sheds can house only hostility - not humans by any stretch of imagination. Ramesh K, member of Bijapura Shoshithara Abhivridhi Vedike (a newly constituted forum to fight discrimination against flood-hit Dalits), confirms that “people are being stuffed into these sheds like cattle”.

Grave errors have crept in, with officials refusing to survey Dalit colonies. The errors appear deliberate. “They are using the 1992 records to fix compensation. Many new houses have come up since then but they weren’t given proper property records. And those who did own have lost them to the floods. Now these records are a must to get relief,” says Kowtal.

Death brings no relief

IN Hachcholli, Dalit youths showed me some unsigned bearer cheques and a slew of unacknowledged petitions seeking relief for damaged houses. One unique case was Sathveerappa’s, whose mother Venkamma was the only villager washed away in the flash floods. Despite repeated pleas, the Rs.1 lakh compensation announced by the government was elusive. “When we asked for compensation, they said ‘what do we do if someone dies’? Later they told me to get a death certificate. Now they are not even ready to sign on it.”

When contacted, Siruguppa Tahsildar Geetha N R said she was not aware of such cases and would look into it personally. But she was quick to mention that these people were frittering away their time and relief money at arrack shops. Reacts Kowtal: “How long will this money last? Why can’t the officials give cheques to the women if they are so concerned?”



SAVITA HIREMATH

Segregated Dalits in Hachcholli of Koppal district.

Religious politics in full swing

IF the system is dehumanising the Dalits over their identity, religious heads are trying to strip them of the same - the most unkindest cut of all.

Be it Marthamma, Ramesh, or Sathveerappa, the only thing that the floods could not take away from them is their identity. Not so anymore with religious forces in particular exploiting the situation under the guise of charity.

Kowtal says in Hulgunchi of Raichur district, local seer Ram Krishna Swamiji offered to adopt the village provided it is named after him. He also insisted that the victims deposit their relief money into his bank account and he would add his own to build a new colony. "These religious heads are trying to push us back into the same Hindutva mould we have been keeping at bay for centuries. Now we have to live in Hindu colonies and walk on Hindu roads. Back to 100 years - all over again."

They feel the atrocities committed against Dalits so far were isolated and individual instances on certain people or villages. "But now they have it in bulk. This is an opportunity for the casteist people to put their deepest prejudices against Dalits to work and co-opt us by giving food and shelter when we are down on our knees."

Kowtal is also critical of the state government's willingness to involve RSS-backed Seva Bharati which allegedly left Muslims and Dalits out of its rehabilitation schemes after the Gujarat earthquake. "Basically it's a casteist government and a majority of those who run it are also casteist. Obviously their interests are protected."

On December 13, their nightmare came true with Chief Minister Yeddyurappa announcing that the shelters built by the Mutts and private firms would be named after them.

Suspended between the predicament of losing their identity and the nasty persistence of the bureaucracy, religious generosity to hem them into their own ideology, the plight of the dalits untangles many a sordid tale wound into a skein by the ravages of the floods.

Floods spared them, but not bureaucrats

KARNATAKA'S bureaucracy eliminated what even the worst floods of the century spared. Patelgalli - a declared slum dominated by 500 Dalit families in Bijapur - will remember the October floods for a different reason altogether. The slum, perching on an elevated land, escaped the fury of the floods with minimal losses only to be flattened by three bulldozers, pressed into service by the district administration, in just 2-3 hours. The victims' protests to save over 500 houses turned futile as did their efforts to salvage their belongings.

Led by police personnel alone in the conspicuous absence of bureaucrats, Ramesh says people were told to pack up within an hour to be shifted out of their 20-year-old dwellings. When they protested, they were lathi-charged, loaded into trucks, and dumped into sheds 9 kms away from Patelgalli - a barren land with no basic amenities including drinking water. "Initially, all the 4000-5000 people were forced to live in only 50 sheds of 10x10 size. They installed 60 more following our protest march. Nearly 4-5 families are living in one shed. One short circuit, and we will all perish," adds Ramesh.

Kowtal and Ramesh, who met the District Commissioner Shantha Kumar along with

“

Basically, it's a casteist government and a majority of those who run it are also casteist. Obviously their interests are protected

”

thousands of protesters, say how the DC ticked them off terming it “orders from above” and washed his hands of saying he was on leave during the demolition. They feel the administration couldn’t think of a better time and excuse as the floods gave “an excellent opportunity” to push the Dalits over the edge.

Kowtal adds: “The entire operation was so swift and well-planned. No parallel arrangements were made nor enough time given to pack things up. What was the need for all this? Even if their version was true, it could have been handled in a humane manner.”

Privatising welfare?

Prof T R Chandrashekar of Hampi Kannada University, who led a team of seven intellectuals and research assistants to eight flood-hit districts, finds it quite beyond the pale to see religious groups and corporates manage relief operations on their own. While appreciating their indirect involvement, he argues that the victims will not be able to question anything even if something goes wrong. “This is our basic contention. The entire flood relief programme should be formulated from the human rights perspective. Not charity.”

He advocates involving local panchayats, human rights groups, and the victims themselves to design their own relief schemes. “If the private firms and Mutts are so compassionate, let them donate the money to the government. If people have to live with dignity, it should be the government’s concern.”

Adds Ramesh: “enough of pity. We don’t want to live on obligation forever.”

“

This is our basic contention. The entire flood relief programme should be formulated from the human rights perspective. Not charity

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5 | POST KARNATAKA FLOODS RELIEF

No home to take them in

Notwithstanding these hellholes called shelters, the state government has been going gung-ho about its 'swift action' to resettle the flood victims in North Karnataka. A visit to one such shed revealed the officials' heartless rhetoric writes **Savita Hiremath**.

1 March 2010 -

THE lush green paddy fields and the sunflower and maize patches on either side of the road leading to Shridharagadde of Bellary district hardly bespeak the tragic aftermath lay in all its brutality just a few miles away.

As our vehicle trundled along the ruddy road and inched closer to the village, torn clothes swept away by the floods and stuck on the thorny bushes by the roadside mutely pointed a finger at a greater misery we were about to witness.

Even before we turned towards the sheds, a frail Rangamma in her 60s dragging a bundle of thorny bushes for fencing her brother's cotton field rushed at us pleading for help. "My house is gone. I work in my brother's fields. These cattle jump over the fence and destroy the cotton. I can chase them during daytime, but I can't do so in the night. I need to sleep. My eyes burn if I don't. Please do something."

The rhetoric of 'rehabilitation'

Once Rangamma poured her heart out, she led us to her shack. That's when I began to realise where all this rhetoric about 'rehabilitation' has led the victims to and wonder if 'normalcy' would be a part of their lives, ever.

In her early 90s, Rangamma's neighbour Hanumanthamma can hardly move around her shed. She lay on donated blankets with a few belongings around her. Still too stunned to realise the heavy blow fallen upon her, she narrates how she lost her 'petari' (a wooden trunk) in which she had kept all her valuables and how she was rescued by her villagers in a raft.

One stroll around the 230 sheds and I could sniff more tragedies skulking around. Som-shekhar Gowda of the neighbouring Hachchholli says: "They have erected each shed with just 8-10 tin sheets with a few wooden posts supporting it. Strong winds are enough of bring



SAVITA HIREMATH

A row of sheds in Shridharagadde of Siruguppa taluk in Bellary district.

down the entire row. Those who survived the floods might now die in these sheds.”

A 10'x10' hellhole

Prof T R Chandrashekhara of Hampi Kannada University, who led a team of seven members to study the nature and consequences of floods from women's perspective, is appalled at the sheer callousness that has worked its way through all the aspects of the rehabilitation process. His team met Hungund tahsildar Jayashree J and complained about the absence of basic amenities including bathroom and toilets. “She told us that it was not a question of funds or space but that they never felt it was necessary (to build bathrooms and toilets). This is the attitude of the bureaucracy.”

The administration's chilling disregard to the victims' plight has found a convenient excuse in the urgency at which it had to ensure relief. The results are tinpot efforts and arbitrary decisions. A case in point is roping in the local contractors and setting a deadline to erect a certain number of sheds on an evened-out land leased out from a local landlord. The result is unliveable shacks.

When it rains, water rushes in and the 10'X10' shed turns into a hellhole. These sheds do not have a bathroom, let alone a toilet. The people themselves have put up a tiny bathroom (if one could call it so) right in front of their respective sheds with rags slung around wooden posts. Salty, impotable water runs through three taps installed in the area. People have to trek up to the river to fetch drinking water.

Nights get particularly harder with the area plunging into darkness as there is no power supply to the streetlights. A few kerosene lanterns bring this harried lot back to life. Wintry winds blow through the gap between the roof and the sheets acting as walls. Chilling winds also sweep beneath and rattle the loosely tied tin sheet acting as a door.

Ubalesh, 25, with a big pot of water on his right shoulder, narrates ruefully that they “are constantly under pressure from the land-owner”. “He tells us what to do and what not to do. When rainwater enters the shed, we have no place to sleep. We requested them to raise it by a foot but nobody cares.”

'Stuffed into sheds like cattle'

Ramesh, member of Bijapura Shoshithara Abhivridhi Vedike (a newly constituted forum to fight discrimination against flood-hit Dalits), regrets how 500 families are forced to live in 110 sheds near Bijapur following the demolition of a Dalit-dominated slum by the district administration. “Nearly 4-5 families are living in one shed. We are being stuffed into these sheds like cattle. We have no privacy. No life. One short circuit and we will all perish. There is no solace outside as it gets really hot here and there are no trees, no shade. No grocery shops either.”

For once, the government statistics do not belie the reality. Claiming “swift relief action and massive reconstruction” in its report “Unprecedented Floods” - dated December 6, the Karnataka government says 34,821 sheds have been set up to shelter 3 lakh families. That means nearly nine families are living in one shed and if each family has a minimum of five members, it is roughly 45 members including elderly people, women, and children. No wonder the victims have hit the streets.



SAVITA HIREMATH

Since the officials didn't include bathrooms as part of the relief operations, this one put up by the victims themselves serves at least 4-5 families.

Not ready to move out

It may take a year or more before 'rehabilitation' is completed. However, Malleshappa Hugar of Hiresindhogi in Koppal district is sceptical about the quality of the housing, especially because of the involvement of contractors. "They (contractors) have swindled enough money and built some shoddy ones. Now they are saying we will get houses worth Rs 1 lakh. I am sure they will build a house with 25,000 rupees and keep the rest for themselves."

Reluctant to be shifted out of their village, Malleshappa and his neighbours argue that the government has chosen a wrong spot for rehabilitation. The price of the land was the deciding factor more than anything else. "For years, we were squeezed dry by the Hirehalla checkdam (near Koppal) that kept flooding our fields. I was never sure that I would bring a few sacks of rice home. Now this village accountant and secretary are sucking our blood. They want us to shift but who will go and live in a place without any facilities? We had spent lakhs of rupees on our houses and they are now saying we should be happy with such dwellings. We will die here but won't move an inch."

When reasoned that the government cannot build houses of their previous worth, Malleshappa says: "We know they cannot. But does that mean we have to move into any house? Don't we know the level of corruption going on here?"

Koppal tahsildar P N Lokesh argues that they are resisting the change because of their "emotional attachment" to the village and that things would gradually fall in place.

But what officials like Lokesh refuse to realise is that the lives of these people were very much strung around these emotions and the same saw them through for generations. Clichés come to their rescue as they rattle off the usual "life-is-about-moving-on" one-liners. It may suit those who do not know what it means to lose everything. It doesn't work with those who know what it means to have houses submerged, fertile fields stripped, cattle dead, and the dear ones turned to starve. The victims' demand is simple: their own participation in designing the future with minimal interference by the administration.

And therein lies the rub.

“

We had spent lakhs of rupees on our houses and they are now saying we should be happy with such dwellings. We will die here but won't move an inch

”

6 | POST FLOODS

Blast hole and bloom together?

It takes more to feed the family amidst destroyed houses and ruined hopes. The flood-hit women in North Karnataka are putting up with more than what their menfolk could ever empathise with. **Savita Hiremath** has more.

Hope had grown grey hairs,

Hope had mourning on,

Trenched with tears, carved with cares,

Hope was twelve hours gone;

And frightful a nightfall folded rueful a day

Nor rescue, only rocket and lightship, shone,

And lives at last were washing away:

To the shrouds they took,—they shook in the hurling and horrible airs.

— G M Hopkins



SAVITA HIREMATH

These Dalit women from Hachcholli taluk of Bellary district have an endless litany of woes, but nobody to listen.

9 February 2010 - “Devastation” and “destruction”

are realms words can't enter but it is these same words thrown around effortlessly these days. To know what it really means to be destroyed; one needs to only listen to the anguished outpourings of those left homeless and famished by the October floods in North Karnataka.

Not that life has been rewarding for a majority of the population here - a region which politicians of all stripes remember only for its backwardness. But the floods have wiped out even that semblance of life established over generations. In the midst of it all lay mutilated hopes and dogged attempts to resume life.

Yet, there's one persistent thread that somehow holds on silently no matter how many

skies have fallen - woman. She is scrambling around hungry with the torment of how to feed her children wearing her skin thin. Although she is the one picking up scraps left behind by the ravages of the tragedy and putting them together to call it life, she has remained invisible to policy-makers.

When I visited flood-hit Hiresindhogi, Kakkaragol, Halegondabalu of Koppal district and Shridharagadde, Hachcholli, and Kudadaral in Siruguppa taluk of Bellary district recently, it didn't take long to realise how a single tragedy can affect different people differently and how women almost always suffer multiple blows.

Whether it is Pavithra (Hiresindhogi) who is into her last few days of pregnancy putting up with her mother who has been reduced to penury, Rangamma of Shridharagadde who is tired of chasing cattle out of her brother's fields, Gangamma (Hiresindhogi) who tries to pacify her infant clutching him to her breasts and complaining of displacement, or a homeless Sarojamma out on the streets with her two young daughters - there seemed to be a painful realisation running through their veins. That no matter how irreversibly and completely the tenor of their life has changed in so short a time, much of it remains the same.

"Namma hanebaraha namge (our fate is ours). Our house collapsed and I have to cook in someone else's house. Even after all this, the men in our house want their food right on time," complains Somavva, 63, of Halegondabalu.

"The situation of women (in India) is bad as it is; it has not changed a bit even after the floods. They were the ones doing all the work - salvaging things from fallen houses, collecting bits and pieces of wood, cooking and feeding their children. Menfolk were not to be seen at all; they were out on some pretext or the other," says Prof T R Chandrashekhara of Hampi Kannada University.

He led a team of seven members to the flood-hit districts to understand the nature of floods, the consequences, how people faced it, and finally, how the government responded to the crisis and how it is formulating the relief operations. "All this from women's perspective," he adds. Sponsored by the Women's Studies Department, this extensive study spread across eight districts and carried out by intellectuals, social activists, and research assistants has been encapsulated into a comprehensive report.

No bathrooms and toilets

THE team met Hungund (another worst-hit taluk) tahsildar Jayashree J and complained about the absence of basic amenities including bathroom and toilets. "She told us that it was not a question of funds or space but that they never felt it was necessary (to build bathrooms and toilets). This is the attitude of the bureaucracy.... Sheds have been constructed but women's interests have not been taken into account. Behind all the designing, planning of the relief programmes, women never even constituted a part."

Basavaraj Kowtal, convenor of Human Rights Front for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka (HR-FDL-K), who toured the worst-hit Bijapur district, lays bare how traumatised women and children are. He feels the government should have at least released the cheques in women's names to prevent men from squandering it away.



SAVITA HIREMATH

Only hard impotable water runs through this tap. Life is beyond any reasonable endurance at these sheds near Shridharagadde of Bellary district where potable drinking water, power, basic amenities like toilet and bathroom are a luxury.

“They could not bathe for days, they had no privacy. This has affected them both physically and psychologically. They are being stuffed like cattle into the sheds and quite a few families are living in one shed. Dalit women suffered even more. They were not allowed to enter temple or school premises to take shelter during floods.”

Nine families stuffed into one shed

WHILE half of Karnataka was witnessing this “unprecedented tragedy” (click here) as the government itself admits, the dissident faction of the Yeddyurappa government was busy with what is now being termed “resort politics”. Not even a few weeks into the floods, the ministers were holed up in resorts in Goa and Hyderabad fine-tuning their political strategies.

For once, the government statistics do not belie the reality. Claiming “swift relief action and massive reconstruction” in its Report to People-1 - “Unprecedented Floods” - dated December 6, the Karnataka government says 34,821 sheds have been set up to shelter 3 lakh families. That means nearly nine families are living in one shed and if each family has a minimum of five members, it is roughly 45 members including elderly people, women, and children.

Describing the situation, Ramesh, member of Bijapura Shoshithara Abhivridhi Vedike (a newly constituted forum to fight discrimination against flood-hit Dalits), regrets how 500 families are forced to live in 110 sheds near Bijapur following the demolition of a Dalit-dominated slum by the district administration. “Nearly 4-5 families are living in one shed. We are being stuffed into these sheds like cattle. We have no privacy. No life. One short circuit and we will all perish. There is no solace outside as it gets really hot here and there are no trees, no shade. No grocery shops either.”

Prof. Chandrashekar’s team met with harsher reality once again when it presented its report to the government at a meet in Bangalore in November last. For what it’s worth, State Nodal Officer on Flood Relief S M Jaamdar termed it ‘partial’ as it talks about only half the population even as he admitted that he had not read the full report.

Prof. Chandrashekar regrets how he made “a light comment” and stormed off the meeting in a huff. “In our report, we are not asking for anything much - but only what the government is supposed to give. We have not given room for any bias; we have worked very hard to be as objective as possible.”

In a world bereft of toys

SHRIDHARAGADDE is no more, but only its starved people and their maimed spirit. A little away from where the village existed till recently, the recent rains had brought in dampness and even the hot sun seemed to be soothing. But once I walked up the paddy fields leading to rows of sheds - 230 in all, I was confronted by a good measure of quiet, but a sinister quiet. The entire area lay as under some dread enchantment - one that doesn’t spare even the children.

A group of children in tattered clothes were huddling together and their chatter didn’t



SAVITA HIREMATH

Hanumanthamma in her early 90s, who lost everything to the floods, describes what it takes to living in this shed which turns into a hellhole the moment it rains at Shridharagadde.

betray the character of childhood. A quick glance and you know it's a world bereft of toys. Up until you visit these shacks, you would believe if someone said "children have no sense of loss". Maybe, that phrase belongs to another time, another world. But here, you'd see this hopeful observation on child psychology turned upside down. The wretched look on these children's faces speaks of the loss they have suffered at such a tender age. While they walk around the sheds starved and naked, everything stands violated - their right to home, right to safety, and right to heal.

No special programmes for children

Somshekhar of Every Child, an NGO fighting for children's rights, visited migration-prone Surupur and Shahapur taluks of Gulbarga district and also Havinahal which was completely submerged. He says the officials promptly distributed books to some kids here as the CM's visit was round the corner. No books were given to the neighbouring Haldaal kids which was also submerged. No officials were visiting it either. "We have been talking to officials including the DDPI but no one seems to have any clue about the children's schooling, their welfare in general."

Similarly, Prof. Chandrashekhar regrets lack of any special programmes like crash courses and extra hours of teaching and counselling for the traumatised children, especially those in Std X. He adds, "it's not just flood relief problem. Basically it's a developmental problem - how we conceive development and what we mean by it. The officials have to put people in the centre stage and design the programmes. They can't do it so mechanically as if they are some inanimate, taken-for-granted things."

— Savita Hiremath

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She writes about gender and human rights
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Exclusion of Dalits in the Flood Rehabilitation Bijapur district, Karnataka

ABOUT HRFDL-K & National Dalit Watch

THE Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation-Karnataka (HRFDL-K) members belong to the untouchable community. Its Karnataka-based activists have been active members of various social movements, particularly Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS).

HRFDL-K was conceived to accelerate the Dalit struggle in Karnataka with a human rights perspective. The key attributes of this network which differentiates it from other groups are that it upholds the values of gender equity and promotes Dalit women leadership through a transparent, decentralized, and participatory approach in all its initiatives.

In the past eight years, HRFDL-K has been able to anchor itself as a strong and sustained struggle towards the liberation of Dalits in Karnataka. Its concerted efforts have built a critical mass base in 11 districts, 22 taluks, 44 Zilla Panchayats, and approximately 1,200 villages in Karnataka. Every member of HRFDL-K is capable of leading campaigns and issue-based advocacy efforts.

Its major target groups include community-based organisations (CBOs) headed by women, Dalit lawyers, Dalit Panchayat members, and Dalit students. Lobbying and advocacy efforts at the State level are complemented by campaigns at the grassroots. They include land struggle, panchayat election campaign, campaign for justice in caste violence and violence against Dalit women, right to education of Dalit children, food security [ICDS & NREG], right to health cam-

paign, campaigns for SC/ST hostels, implementation of reservation especially in the private sector, struggle against the impacts of globalisation, and against the Hindu fascist groups.

HRFDL-K has been able to build its own identity, while extending solidarity to various other progressive peoples' struggles at State and national levels.

National Dalit Watch

The National Dalit Watch (NDW) is an initiative of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) which has emerged from an informed recognition of the rampant discrimination and exclusion faced by Dalit communities during disaster response and mitigation. Building on the experiential base of NCDHR in exposing and countering exclusion in some of the major disasters of our times (Tsunami in 2004, Bihar Floods in 2007 and 2008), NDW has been working towards developing tools and methods to identify, expose, and document this form of discrimination. NDW enables Dalit rights organizations, local activists, and the community leadership in various parts of the country to effectively monitor discrimination and exclusion during disasters. Through advocacy and mobilization, the NDW works towards instituting a policy environment that recognizes such discrimination and defining entitlements of survivors in a manner that makes the State accountable.

A study undertaken by HRFDL (K)
&
National Dalit Watch - March 2010

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