Relief eludes women victims of atrocities

Official apathy renders SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act toothless; provisions rarely adhered to

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Payment of pension as additional relief to victims of rape, gang-rape or murder, provided for under the SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, are rarely ever adhered to. District Collectors have no clue about it, and letters to the government seeking clarity have evoked no response, say activists.

In case of atrocities including murder, death, massacre, rape, gang-rape, permanent incapacitation and dacoity, the Act entitles the victims or their kin to a basic pension amounting to ₹5,000 a month, with admissible dearness allowance and employment to one member of the deceased’s family, provision of agricultural land and house.

The pension provision is never adhered to, alleges Dalit Sthree Sakthi, an NGO providing legal aid to SC/ST victims. “District Collectors have to pay the relief. But they refuse it saying there is no precedent. Letters to the government do not evoke any response,” says Daniel Prakash, programme manager of the organisation.

In many instances, inclusion of sections of SC/ST Act itself becomes a challenge. A case in point is Renuka of Budige Jangala caste, who committed suicide in Ranga Reddy district reportedly due to harassment and humiliation by her teachers. Though a case was filed in 2010 immediately after her suicide, the police invoked SC/ST Act provisions only five years later.

“We raised the issue in District Vigilance and Monitoring Committee meeting, and the Collector asked the Cyberabad Commissioner to include the relevant sections. We realised that nothing had been done towards this when the victim's parents received summons from the sessions court. High Court was approached then, and we got a favourable ruling. However, the defendants approached another bench of HC and got the order cancelled,” says Mr. Prakash, narrating the saga of ordeals.

The police fell in line only after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) took suo motu cognisance of the case, learning about it through The Hindu newspaper. In its camp sitting at Hyderabad in 2015, NHRC ordered for inclusion of the relevant sections.

Apathy on the part of district administration or police is just a drop in the ocean that the victims’ kin are forced to swim in before they attain or are denied any justice. Tardy progress is a common feature with respect to all SC/ST cases.

Renuka’s case, for instance, has not come for trial until now. Eight years is a long fight endured by Hanumanthu, her father, who ekes a livelihood by begging.

Tara (name changed), another SC girl, a minor, was gang-raped and murdered in 2010. Eight years later, the accused are out on bail, while her two brothers, attacked by the rapists, are incapacitated for life. “No compensation has been paid to the brothers, though the Act entitles them to it. We are facing other problems, too, as the case was transferred to Medchal after district re-organisation, but the files were not,” says Gaddam Jhansi, the DSS Convenor.