

Dalit tortured for refusing to work in fields

A Dalit was allegedly held captive and thrashed for six days in Nalanda - the home district of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar - after he refused to work in the fields of an upper caste man.

Not only were his wife and minor daughter forced to work in his place during that time but the family was also turned away by the local police when it tried to lodge a complaint, he has alleged.

It all happened last week in Ghostawan village of Nalanda district, about 100 km from here, when Suresh Manjhi, a landless labourer from the impoverished Moosahar caste, refused to work for Abhay Singh and three others belonging to the upper caste Bhoomihar.

'My only crime was that I refused to work in their fields as they were giving just one kilogram of food grain in return for 10 to 12 hours of toil,' an official at a special police station for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Biharsharif near here, quoted Manjhi as saying.

Manjhi has alleged that he was brutally thrashed, abused and threatened with death by Singh and three accomplices. The beatings led to a fracture in one arm and serious injuries in the other.

Manjhi said poor landless people like him were treated like slaves by the powerful landed classes.

'The helpless and poor like me are not free people. We have to live under the shadow of fear and at the mercy of people like Abhay Singh, who tortured me to teach a lesson to me and others so that we don't raise our voice,' Manjhi told police.

Three of the four accused are absconding.

Manjhi also said the local Silao police station near his village turned away his wife when she went there to file a complaint. That's when the family approached the special police station for the Scheduled Castes in Biharsharif.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (Rajgir) Ashok Kumar said one of the accused had been arrested after a complaint was lodged two days ago under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in the Schedule Castes police station.

Karamveer Prasad Singh, officer in charge of the police station, said: 'It's a clear case of an oppressed man being tortured by landed persons.'

However, Anil Kumar Singh, officer in charge of the Silao police station, downplayed the case saying Manjhi's allegations appeared to be far from the truth as the accused were not powerful, landed men.

Dalits constitute nearly 15 percent of Bihar's 83 million population.

Imran Khan (© IANS / India eNews)