

Dalit woman stopped from cooking mid-day meals

Students of a government-run school in a Bihar village have been deprived of mid-day meals after upper caste men came out against a Dalit woman's cooking.

Lalita Devi, 30, a Dalit appointed for preparing mid-day meals at the primary school in Pipri village of Rohtas district, was Friday dragged out of the school kitchen by upper caste men. She said her husband was also assaulted.

'I was humiliated and threatened with dire consequences if I made any attempt to cook mid-day meals or enter the kitchen again,' she told the local media.

In her complaint to the police, Lalita said the school committee secretary, Uma Shankar Tiwari, and his upper caste henchmen warned her not to cook mid-day meals for students.

'Tiwari and his men prevented me from cooking mid-day meals, damaged the hearth and took away the aluminium utensils,' she said.

Lalita was appointed the school cook by the Mahila Samkhya Society, which looks after the village level implementation of the mid-day meal scheme under the Bihar Education Project.

A five-member committee including four Dalit women was constituted by the society to monitor the mid-day meal scheme for 87 students, including 39 Dalits, at the school.

'The ban on cooking mid-day meals by the Dalit woman has deprived the students of their meals,' said Asha Devi, a committee member.

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