

K'taka govt warns temples against barring dalits' entry

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Bengaluru: Week after two committees of the Karnataka legislature referred to back-to-back incidents of dalits being barred from entering temples and large-scale mismanagement of temple resources, the state government has taken serious note of the trend and the Hindu religious and charitable endowment (muzrai) department has warned of serious action in case of any discrimination between devotees.

Demanding equal treatment to all devotees, regardless of caste or creed, the House committee on SC/ST welfare, headed by BJP MLA MP Kumaraswamy, had asked the state government to install boards at temples run by the muzrai department that people of all castes would be allowed. "Despite reforms and awareness, there have been instances of Dalits being barred from entering temples in many parts of the state. These

Notice to UP DM for felling 85 dalit units

The Uttar Pradesh human rights commission has issued a notice to Baghpat district magistrate (DM) Rajkamal Yadav, ordering him to take appropriate action after 85 small leather tannery units were demolished when "they were only asked to be closed down". The panel ordered him to "comply with its directive and inform". The administration in its defence said the units were "closed" in compliance with National Green Tribunal order. TNN

incidents shall not be allowed in future," the committee noted in its report to the House.

Terming caste-based discrimination as unfortunate, muzrai minister Shashikala Jolle told **TOI** that the department would adopt a zero-tolerance policy to prevent such incidents in future. Despite the government's efforts to ensure equality among devo-

tees, such incidents had been taking place, Jolle said. "We will once again send out orders to all temples. If any temple violates the rule and orders of the department, they will be dealt with seriously," the minister warned.

Another committee on backward classes and minorities welfare, headed by BJP MLA Kumar Bangarappa, expressed concern over mismanagement in administration of some temples.

"Devotees from other states, too, throng our temples and there has been a sharp increase in cases of pickpocketing and women devotees being harassed. Hence, all temples and their premises be secured through CCTV cameras and monitored constantly," the committee recommended.

Besides, the panel said, 70 per cent of the money received in the cash collection boxes (hundi) was spent on paying salaries to the employees and 'A' category temples must create a fixed source of income to meet such expenses.



There is a need for launching an aggressive public awareness campaign so that people know how they can have access to the authorities

Naseem Khatoon, member, NHRC core group on NGOs



Born in a red light chawl, she pioneered the sex worker's cause. Naseema is now part of India's national human rights panel. Ramashankar reports



Her journey, as a human rights defender

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SHE spent her childhood witness to the dark reality of a red light area in Bihar's Muzaffarpur but she always wanted to chart a different course for herself.

Now, she is a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)'s core group on NGOs and a 'human rights defender'.

Naseema Khatoon's success demonstrates her indomitable spirit, fighting all odds to carve a niche for herself in this tough world.

Naseema was born in the red light area of Bihar's Muzaffar-

pur, known as 'Chaturbhuj Asthan'. Her father who had a tea stall nearby was adopted by a sex worker as a boy as she herself was brought up by the grandmother.

She was given a new life in 1995, when IAS officer Rajbala Verma launched alternate programmes for sex workers and their families. Naseema got herself enrolled in one such programme, called "Better Life Option", earning up to ₹500 a month for crochet work.

Inspired by her success, she started running awareness programmes on the rights of marginalised workers, legal awareness and educational

programmes.

It is her constant endeavour that attracted the attention of NHRC which nominated her to its advisory group. Naseema gives credit to her elders and community for getting the recognition and responsibility to fight for the rights of marginalised people at the national level. She said, "Disadvantaged people of our community are now coming forward and fighting for their rights."

Naseema had a chance meeting with a social worker in a conference in 2003 and later she married him in 2008. Her husband is from Jaipur and now she has a son too.

CONQUERING ADVERSITY



Naseema Khatoon during a TEDx Talks event from 2019

But she always wanted to do something different as she launched a handwritten magazine, 'Jugnu' in 2004. This magazine publishes handwritten articles from the children of sex workers, who cover stories related to sex workers and rape victims, interviews and other similar issues. Children also edit the 32-page magazine, which is published from Muzaffarpur.

Naseema, who is presently doing her BA from Indira Gandhi National Open University, is founder secretary of an NGO which works to protect sex workers and their families from police atrocities.

Naseema also took up the cudgels for providing better employment opportunities to wom-

en in the area in collaboration with District Industries Centre manager Dharmendra Kumar Singh under the chairmanship of Muzaffarpur District Magistrate Pranav Kumar. The women here have come forward to work on stitching by forming an organization called the Zohra Promotion Group, and the Jugnu Ready Made Garment.

"I have yet to attend my first meeting as a member of the NHRCs advisory group but I have some suggestions up my sleeve," she remarked.

"NHRC and other government bodies have made arrangements for the protection of human rights but they need to be simplified and should be made transparent so that victims of human rights violations can take benefits of them in a hassle-free manner," Naseema who is excited about her new role remarked.

She said that there is a WhatsApp number to lodge a complaint related to the human rights violation of human rights but many victims were unaware of it and even if they knew it, they found it difficult to lodge complaints and complete other necessary formalities.

Naseema said that the advisory committees constituted at the organisation level or government level to check exploitation at places of occupation have also remained on paper.

"A female employee of a reputed company complained to her employer about a rape bid made by her colleagues but the advisory committee constituted at the organisation level hushed up the case by assuring that the accused will be transferred to a remote area," she said.