

The Lesser Known Gujarat
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I live in two different Gujarat. One Gujarat is well known. It is the vibrant Gujarat. It is the Gujarat of promises and wishful thinking. It is the Gujarat of the “Best Chief Minister in India”, Mr. Narendra Modi. It is the Gujarat of Co-operative Bank scams. It is the Gujarat of the rich becoming richer and the poor, ever more poorer. I live in this shining Gujarat.

I also live in another Gujarat. It is the Gujarat of poverty and injustice. It is the Gujarat of discrimination and death meted out to Dalits. It is the Gujarat of fear and unemployment among the minority communities. It is the Gujarat of utter neglect of Adivasi tribals and Dalits by the politicians and administrative babus. It is the Gujarat of qualified and employable Dalits, Adivasis and persons of minority communities and yet 40,000 reserved jobs remain unfilled in the state!

Here I would like to write about the Gujarat of discrimination and death meted out to Dalits. It is the story of castism and untouchability. I would like to share with you a concrete instance of a miscarriage of law in the brutal killing of a Dalit at Kasumbaad village in Anand District.

Recently many newspapers reported the killing of a Dalit, Mr. Ramanbhai Dahyabhai Rohit. According to some newspaper reporters it was a revenge killing for Ramanbhai a Dalit cutting the kite of Mafatbhai Rabari. But the people who have visited Kasumbaad village have a different story to tell.

A national Literary Award winner and social activist, Mr. Joseph Macwan visited the village and has written in a fortnightly “Dalit Adhikar” a long and detailed report of the events and forces which led to the killing of Ramanbhai Rohit and subsequent attempts to cover up and protect the law breakers involving both the local politicians and law enforcement authorities!

Kasumbaad in Borsad Taluka is ten kilometers away from Anklaon town, where there is the nearest police station. The village has about 2600 population with about 400 families of Thakors and Darbars and two families of Vankars 7 families of Chamars. The Rabaries have about 8 houses on the road side.

According to Mr. Joseph Macwan the majority population of Thakors and Darbars were no match to the head strong Rabaries. Among them Mafatbhai Prabhatbhai Rabari is said to have acquired 30 to 35 ‘vigha’ field by less than fair means and became ‘Sarpanch’ (village leader) for 10 years through intimidation of the village people. But a magazine ‘Dalitshakti’ has reported that Mafatbhai was dismissed from the post of village Sarpanch by the District Development Officer. For there were a number of complaints against him such as destroying tomato crops and torching the huts in the fields of Dalits.

With his political influence as a supporter of the Sangh Parivar and the ruling party (BJP) the law enforcement authorities are said to have collided with Mafatbhai Rabari in not registering cases against him and not taking timely, preventive action.

For instance, as Mr. Macwan has written, on the kite-flying day of Uttarayan, Mafatbhai misbehaved with the dalit women folk and Ramanbhai and his brother Devajibhai and other dalit people were threatened with dire consequences. Fearing unforeseen consequences, 5-6 dalit people reached the Anklao police station at 3 PM on January 14 to file their complaint against Mafatbhai Rabari. The Dalit found in the police station Mafatbhai sitting with P.S.I., Mr. S. B. Kumpavat! After keeping the Dalit people for three hours in the police station, the P.S.I. Kumpavat told them that he is not taking their complaint; so they can go away and do what they can do. Fearing trouble the Dalits returned to the village under the cover of darkness.

On the next day morning fearing for their lives, Ramanbhai, Devjibhai, Kantibhai and Dineshbhai and some women like Ambaben, Pushpaben and Ushaben went to Borsad and met Mr. Amitbhai Chavda, MLA (BJP). Seeing the fear of death among the Dalits, Mr. Chavda faxed a message to DSP at Anand, Mr. B. S. Jebaliya and noted their complaint at 1 pm. The Dalits returned from Borsad with the understanding that police protection would be provided in their village by evening.

Since they have lodged the complaint through the MLA, the Dalits felt safe. In the evening Ramanbhai and his brother Kantibhai and their father Dahyabhai went to their field to inspect that their cultivations have not been destroyed as on previous occasions.

At about six o'clock they turned home from their field. While Kantibhai and Dahyabhai lingered a little longer in the field, Ramanbhai went ahead only to fall prey to the waiting jaws of death. Hiding on the way as reported by Joseph Macwan in Dalit Adhikar, Mafatbhai Rabari and his accomplices pounced on Raman with a scythe and other deadly weapons. Hearing the deadly cry of Ramanbhai, Kantibhai and Dahyabhai rushed to Raman's rescue but seeing many people with deadly weapons they ran for their lives. Mafatbhai and his accomplices pursued them but gave up their chase of the father and the son as they were shouting for help and the pursuers were afraid of getting caught by people.

As noted by Joseph in his report Dahyabhai and Kantibhai saw the murders. Among the murders were Mafatbhai Rabari and his son Jitendra Mafat, Nattu Mansinh, Pravin Nattu, Dinesh Chandu, Nattu Kalu, Govind Ranchhod Rabari, Vikram Nattu Chauhan and four others.

Back in their village Dahyabhai and Kantibhai gathered relatives and villagers and reached the spot of the attack only to find the death body of Ramanbhai soaked in blood with multiple wounds.

The terrible killing of Ramanbhai would not have happened if the Anklao P.S.I., Mr. S. B. Kumpavat had filed the FIR of the Dalits or even the DSP Anand, Mr. B. S. Jebaliya acted on the complaint faxed to him by the Dalits through their BJP-MLA, Mr. Amitbhai Chavda. The DSP Mr. B. S. Jebaliya visited the spot of the brutal murder and told the people that "those who have done this dastardly crime would be punished and no mercy would be shown to the murderers." But the Dalit people know that the law is never on their side and that they will never get justice as the murder itself is a miscarriage of the law.

I live in the Gujarat where 5,009 cases were registered under Atrocity Act from January 2001 to June 2005 as reported by Sandesh, A Gujarati daily on January 16, 2006.

So I live in the Gujarat where the Dalits and Adivasis and the minorities are asking, “are we not the citizens of India? Are we not among the 5 crore population of Gujarat, of whom Mr. Narendra Modi claims to be the Chief Minister?