

Caste Hindus refuse to have a Dalit postmaster

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TIRUNELVELI: On July 14, 2003, Jayaprakash was selected as branch postmaster of Velayuthapuram, in Subramaniapuram panchayat, near Kazhugumalai in Thoothukudi district. Exactly one year has passed and he has not reported for duty for a reason that is shocking. The caste Hindus in the Velayuthapuram are not providing accommodation to him, because he is a Dalit.

Now they change the tack and said that he is not the son of the soil. Jayaprakash, who is from the nearby Nainampatti, said the caste Hindus had told him that they would not give accommodation for a Dalit.

Surrounded as they are by around 300 dominant Reddiar community, the 40 Dalit ('Arunthathiar') families could do nothing about the plight of Jayaprakash.

Jayaprakash was selected through a properly conducted interview after his elder brother Violet, who first got the nod, failed to produce the 'property qualification certificate'.

Hence, the department, subsequently, re-notified the post for 'other castes', and selected a (dominant caste), physically challenged girl, Muthulakshmi of Velayuthapuram. Violet, however, obtained a verdict from the Central Administrative Tribunal stating that only an SC candidate should be appointed in the absence of ST candidates.

Following this, the department once again re-notified, held interview and selected Jayaprakash. A desperate Jayaprakash approached Vilathikulam MLA N.K. Perumal for help. But, the panchayat president, Sundaresa Reddiyar refused to budge.

There is 'oor kattupadu' here was the reply from the caste Hindus, including the ex-panchayat president, Radhakrishnan of the CPI. Jayaprakash represented this matter to the then Thoothukudi district Collector, K. Rajaraman.

The efforts of Collector to help Jayaprakash get an accommodation also went in vain.

Unable to enforce their writ, the authorities chose a soft option - that of looking for another building, of a local co-operative society, to accommodate the post office.

But the villagers would not allow the Kovilpatti tahsildar, Perumal, and postal department officials to even inspect the building.

Then, as per the suggestion of the officials, Jayaprakash borrowed Rs 20,000, and forwarded it to the co-operative department for putting up a separate room inside the cooperative godown.

But, unfortunately for him, Collector Rajaraman was transferred and subsequently, the co-operative department returned the DD to Jayaprakash. C. Palsamy, and CPI's Radhakrishnan, both caste Hindus claimed that theirs was a peaceful village.

The local postman is a Dalit, so too the salesman in the ration shop, they pointed out.

They said that they are not opposing a Dalit becoming a postmaster, but they only want a person from their own village to be selected for the post.

But, inquires revealed that no Dalit in the village qualified for the post, especially as they would not be able to produce property qualification certificate.