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Press Release

The Human Rights Forum (HRF) is of the view that the sole section pertaining to ‘abetment of suicide’ in the case of Peram Antony at the Tadepalli police station, Guntur district is insufficient. We demand addition of various penal sections to the case including kidnap, wrongful confinement, casteist abuse and attempt to murder showing several police personnel as accused.

Sections pertaining to kidnap (Sec. 363 of IPC), wrongful confinement (Sec. 342 of IPC), institution of false legal proceedings against a member of Scheduled Tribe and a member of Scheduled Caste (Sec. 3(1)(p) of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act), abusing a member of a Scheduled Tribe (Sec. 3(1)(s) of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act), committing offence against a member of Scheduled Tribe punishable with imprisonment for life under IPC (Sec. 3(2)(v) of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act) should added to the case. Kamalakara Rao, sub-inspector attached to the Central Crime Station (CCS), Ongole and three constables attached to the same station should be named as accused in the aforementioned case. We also demand that the DSP of CCS, Ongole, A Prasad Kumar, be divested of his duties and investigated for abetting and allowing the torture to take place in the CCS, Ongole. Peram Antony should be paid compensation for the humiliation he suffered and the money his family had to spend to save his life.

Following media reports, a two-member HRF team on Tuesday visited Tadepalli and Ongole to ascertain facts of the case. We met and spoke with Peram Antony, Giri Sekhar and their family members at Mahanadu Nagar. We met the DSP of CCS, Ongole A Prasad Rao and Parandhamaiah, the C.I. attached to CCS, Ongole and also spoke over the phone with the Tadepalli SI.

On 30th of May, 2019, Peram Antony (23) from Mahanadu Nagar, Tadepalli attempted to take his life by consuming rat poison. Before consuming poison he sent a message to his elder sister through Whatsapp messenger informing her of the decision to end his life. He stated that he was unable to bear the physical and psychological torture he was subjected to by police personnel of the CCS, Ongole, where he was tortured to hand over money/jewelry that he had never stolen.

Peram Antony, a Scheduled Tribe of the Yerukula community, recently completed his engineering from a college in Chennai. Giri Sekhar, a Mala by caste and an

auto-driver by profession is staying at Antony's house with his family. Antony's mother, Peram Prameela, a widow, deals in Sari trade and money lending. On the 26th May, 2019, at around 8 am, a team of police personnel in mufti and hankies tied around their faces barged into Antony's house, and in full public view forcefully dragged him and Sekhar into a seven-seater auto they had come in. Both were handcuffed and shifted to a police vehicle parked at some distance near Nulakapeta, Tadepalli and taken to the CCS, Ongole. They were beaten enroute.

Antony and Sekhar were kept in wrongful confinement for five days and subjected to torture and incessant casteist abuses. Both were tied to window grills at one end of the room on the first floor of the CCS. Sekhar, who suffers from diabetes, hypertension and tuberculosis was not even spared the handcuffs and chains to his legs as a result of which there are still bruises all over his legs owing to his diabetic condition. He was not even administered the insulin injection that is a medical necessity for him every day. The doctor who was called in after he fainted informed the police he was running high levels of diabetes of around 460 mg/dL.

S.I. Kamalakara Rao and three other constables of the CCS, Ongole tortured Antony accusing him of a theft and that he should bring back either Rs 6 lakh or 160 grams of jewelry to the police. He was threatened with death in the lock up if his mother failed to hand over the money to them. Every day, for five days, the police personnel beat up Antony in a brutal manner. While two constables would stand on his forcefully stretched legs, Kamalakara Rao and a constable would beat him on his legs, buttocks and hands with their batons. This violence was accompanied by casteist slurs such as 'You Yerukula fellows are capable of only doing robbery', 'I know what your mother is up to'. While beating Antony, S.I. Kamalakara Rao would call up his mother and say 'you slut, give me 6 lakhs or 160 grams of jewelry if you want your son to come out alive. Or else, I will skin him to death.' He would make sure that the screams of Antony were heard by his mother over the phone. This routine continued everyday till the 29th of May.

Antony's mother Prameela consistently refused these demands saying she would take recourse to legal help. So, after four days, with no ransom forthcoming despite inflicting brutal violence, the police took Antony and Sekhar to the One Town Police Station in Ongole, took 14 fingerprints of each of them, and made them sign a bind-over bond as per Sec. 109 of Cr.P.C. Even this act of the police is in blatant disregard of law as they failed to follow requisite procedure required in bindover proceedings. After this the two were let off.

Upon reaching home on 30th of May, 2019, Antony, unable to put up with haunting trauma because of the maltreatment he had undergone at the hands of the police, decided to take his life. At around midnight he consumed rat poison with water. Before consuming the rat poison he messaged his elder sister on Whatsapp messenger informing her of his decision. His elder sister immediately alerted his mother. Antony was rushed to the nearby Manipal hospital where he survived and was told that he should be in hospital care for five days, However, he was discharged abruptly after two days with no reason given. It cost his family Rs. 36,000 for the treatment.

It is pertinent here to point out that it has become routine practice for the police to pick up members of the Yerukula community whenever they have to recover stolen goods. This obnoxious practice is often followed by brutal torture in custody. Stigmatizing an entire community and then

instrumentalizing such constructed stigma for their benefit has become the *modus operandi* of the Andhra Pradesh police over the last many decades. It is also important to point out that the abuse of police power has been recurring unhindered in this state. This is at least 13th case of police custodial brutality in the last 18 months.

We reiterate that the aforementioned sections should be added to the FIR with S.I. Kamalakara Rao and three constables named as accused. In the meanwhile, SI Kamalakara Rao and DSP A Prasad Kumar should be suspended from their duties and an investigation must be carried out. We urge the government to take necessary steps to ensure that the police desist from harassing and torturing members of the Yerukula community. We urge the government to take appropriate action to put a halt to custodial violence.

K Sudha (HRF AP State general secretary)

G Rohith (HRF Krishna District convener)

12-6-2019

Vijayawada