

## IPD Salappa

Whenever the issue of the rights of Bengaluru's civic workers – be they street sweepers, garbage lifters or sanitary workers – comes up for discussion, there is no question of ignoring one person – IPD Salappa. An Ambedkarite and Gandhian rolled into one, Salappa organised pourakarmikas, gave them a voice and weaved a sense of community among them. The Salappa Committee Report, submitted as far back as 1976, is a pioneering document not only on the socio-economic status of civic workers in Karnataka, but also a guideline for the community's emancipation. It is considered the last word on pourakarmika welfare to this day.

Iyyavarapalli Peddayya Dodda Salappa was born in Goripalya of Jagajivan Ram Nagar locality in Bengaluru on December 11, 1929. His father I M Peddayya and mother Kulayamma lived in the sanitary workers' colony in Goripalya. Peddayya's ancestors came to Mysuru State as railway coolies in 1910. They were originally from Iyyavarapalli, a village near Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh.

Kulayamma died when Salappa was a six-month-old child. Pourakarmika women in the locality who were new mothers, wet-nursed Salappa. Salappa went to primary and middle school at Goripalya and Chamarajpet respectively, and later to the Old Fort High School. Higher studies were not an option for the poor family.

While Salappa was in school, in the 1930s, the Freedom Movement was in full swing. Returning home from school one evening in 1938-39, he was witness to a group of protestors being arrested by the police. Salappa recalled how, as he walked past the arrested freedom fighters, one of them placed a khadi cap on Salappa's head.

As a student of Old Fort High School in 1942, young Salappa participated in the Quit India Movement. He joined a group of youth shouting "Bharath Mata Ki Jai" and forced shops and business establishments to shut down in support of the Movement.

At T R Mill, when he was protesting in a mob, the police fired teargas shells to disperse the crowd. Salappa remembers that he ran towards the Azad Nagar maidan. Salappa also participated in the Arcot Boycott in 1947.

It was when he became the foreman of sanitary workers at Binny Mill that Salappa's life mission began to take shape. Seeing the plight of civic workers from close quarters, a community to which he belonged, he began to organise them and went on to become general secretary of the staff association. He witnessed the sub-human treatment meted out to both men and women civic workers by superiors. Physical abuse was rampant. Most often, they were kicked with booted feet. Women workers were often dragged by their hair and subjected to sexual abuse.

Notwithstanding his family's precarious financial condition, Salappa quit his job as foreman and plunged into the workers' struggle to demand better working conditions.

### Educate, Organise, Agitate:

For the sanitary workers in Bengaluru who used to shudder at the sight of officials, Salappa infused a sense of community and gave them a voice. An able orator, he articulated the trials and tribulations of the hitherto unheard community. In 1964, he led the city corporation workers' federation into demanding workers' rights. In 1966, he successfully led a hunger strike outside the city corporation headquarters.

A Gandhian at heart, Salappa deployed Babasaheb Ambedkar's 3-pronged approach for the emancipation of depressed castes – educate, organise, agitate. In 1956, he started Tilak Patashala, a school in Goripalya where children from all communities were admitted. Poor children who studied at the school went on to become achievers in their own right.



In the pourakarmika colony in Goripalya, Salappa revived the Harijana Yuvakara Seva Samaja, a forum founded by Gandhi. He even started a night school for the uneducated and illiterate. He placed equal stress on sports and cultural activities while actively campaigning against alcohol, gambling and the custom of consuming dead livestock.

In 1966, Salappa founded a weekly newspaper named 'Bhangi Bandhu'. As editor, he strived to raise awareness on the conditions of sanitary workers through his articles. He wrote without fear or favour on a host of issues such as price rise, poverty, caste, corruption and scandals in the civic body.

### The social reformer

Civic workers in the city corporation, whether they worked in the engineering section, the malaria section or the gardening section, were treated as untouchables. Officials and other higher ups used to address them in the singular. Salappa was bent on teaching the officialdom how to treat workers as equals. Long before the Untouchability Act came into force, Salappa gave them a lesson in treating lower-level employees.

He was a pioneer in ensuring not only that they are treated with respect, but fought for special allocation from the government for their emancipation. He was instrumental in coining the term 'pourakarmika' when several casteist terms and slurs were commonly used to refer to sanitary workers.

Realising that officials were diverting funds reserved for the welfare of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe employees to other programmes, Salappa launched a struggle during the decade between 1970-1980. His demand, in accordance with what Dr Ambedkar had prescribed, was that 18% of the budget should be reserved for SCs and STs. Interestingly, Karnataka passed the Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Tribes Sub Plan (Planning, Allocation and Utilisation of Financial Resources Act) that reserves funds for SC and ST welfare, as recently as in 2013. Salappa succeeded in getting 18% financial reservation in the city corporation.

While the larger battles continued, Salappa ensured all through his life that children of pourakarmika families got admission into schools and colleges. He even helped them with fee money and school uniforms.

In 1995, Salappa visited Nagpur's Dalit colony in his capacity as Chairman of the National Safai Karamchari Commission. He discovered that the water source in the colony, a well that was specially built under Mahatma Gandhi's instructions, was in disuse and presented a sorry picture. Salappa immediately ordered the restoration of the well at a cost of Rs 5 lakh.

Salappa was a rationalist at heart. He encouraged scientific temper, always encouraging the depressed classes to shed superstition. He advocated abstinence and asked them to eat nutritious food. He implored them to learn a new word every day instead of drinking and gambling. He also discouraged the community from offering liquor to folk deities. God, he would say, will not help unless one helps oneself.

### Political Life

Salappa realised that political power was essential for any lasting change in the condition of the depressed classes in general and pourakarmikas in particular. A Congressman, he began to cultivate leading political leaders of the day like Devaraj Urs, B Basavalingaiah and B Rachaiah. Later on, he even shared platforms with Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and other national leaders. In 1969, he was appointed general secretary of the Congress Party's SC, ST Wing.

In 1978, he was elected to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly from Binnypet constituency in Bengaluru. It was the first time that a SC candidate contested and won from an unreserved seat, at least in Karnataka. His



contribution for the welfare of pourakarmikas took a leap during his tenure as Member of the Legislative Assembly, from 1978-1983.

His honesty and commitment to his role as an elected representative was total. To this end, he even cut across party lines. When, during Chief Minister N Gundu Rao's tenure, illicit liquor killed scores of poor people in Bengaluru, the entire Opposition boycotted the Assembly. When there was not a single member in the Opposition benches, Salappa took over the role of the Opposition from his seat in the Treasury benches. His fiery speech came from years of struggle of the downtrodden.

His brief one-term stint as an elected representative ended in 1983. He contested from Binnypet again, but lost. That did not stop Salappa from continuing his fight for pourakarmikas outside the walls of the Legislature.

Despite discontinuing studies after school, Salappa was an avid reader all through his life. He even went on to study for a Masters degree in political science from Mysore University.

Ambedkar, Gandhi, Jagjivan Ram and Pourakarmikas.

Salappa often said that his two eyes were Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram, and that his mind was Gandhi. When asked who the rest of his body was, he would say: "pourakarmikas".

At a point when there was no job security for civic workers, Salappa launched a struggle to demand regularisation of employment. Those were days when pourakarmikas were dismissed every month and new hands hired, in order to break the chain of continuous employment. Even those with 30 to 40 years of service could be fired after being paid Rs 400 as gratuity. Salappa's struggle in 1969 led to regularisation for 500 workers.

Salappa launched several satyagrahas to demand that Karnataka Civil Service Rules apply to pourakarmikas. One of his longest satyagrahas which lasted 78-days, made KCSR rules applicable in the recruitment of pourakarmikas.

He was instrumental in getting housing facilities, housing sites and pensions sanctioned for pourakarmikas. He mandated jobs on compassionate grounds, to a member of the family of any pourakarmika who died in service.

#### Singular contribution

Salappa pressed successive governments for a status report on the living conditions of the pourakarmika community. On 23 September 1972, the government instituted the Karnataka Sweepers and Scavengers Living and Working Conditions Improvement Committee and made Salappa its chairman.

Although the committee was constituted, it was initially given neither the facilities nor infrastructure to carry out its work. Finally, its study commenced only in 1974. To begin with, it sent out a questionnaire for local bodies, in order to understand the state of pourakarmikas. When it realised that the replies given were not substantial, committee members personally toured the State and met the entire range of sanitary workers.

The Committee report, which is popularly known as the Salappa Committee Report, was submitted in November 1976. It made 58 recommendations, many of which are pioneering suggestions and have not been met even to this day.

The report not only recommended 18% reservation in jobs in the city corporation for SC and ST, it specified that there should be reservation in each cadre. This was because downtrodden castes were given only pourakarmika

jobs in the civic body. And, non-Dalits who were appointed as pourakarmikas, were given jobs that did not involve cleaning streets, drains and the like.

The report took note that supervisors of pourakarmikas are invariably from non-Dalit castes, and that they abused and ill-treated pourakarmikas. Strict action was recommended against such supervisors.

Although carrying nightsoil had been banned, the Salappa Committee report found its continuance in North Karnataka. It recommended modernisation of toilets and funding from local bodies, in instalments, for the purpose. Action was recommended against local bodies that were delaying release of funds for modernisation of toilets.

Calling for pourakarmika work to be categorised as a hazardous occupation, the report recommended regularisation of those with one year of continuous service; a special wage (20% of basic salary) for sewage workers, a 500:1 ratio of population to pourakarmikas; a weekly off, 3 month sick leave, 2 month maternity leave, 15 days of leave travel allowance every year, uniform work hours of not more than 6 hours for men and women alike, the two-shift system, overtime and that women workers should not work for more than 7 hours, OT included.

Keeping the health and safety of pourakarmikas in mind, the report called for long brooms for sweeping, lids for bins, separate workers for loading/unloading garbage, 6 workers to a truck and special equipment such as rubber gloves, gum boots and face mask for all. The report said that no pourakarmika should clean more than 15000 Sq ft of street or 1000 sq ft of drains. Free medical check-ups every three months, insurance, loans, compulsory education for children of pourakarmikas, creches, uniforms, books and hostels were also recommended.

The Salappa Committee recommended that manhole workers (manual scavenging was not banned by law) should be given special wages (30% extra of their basic pay) besides being provided full-body suits and gas masks.

The Committee recommended promotions to qualified pourakarmikas, selection grade salary every 7 years, rotation of work within cadres, retirement age of 58 years and housing with water and power supply, community halls and gyms in townships etc. The report specified that pourakarmika housing should not be segregated from that of other workers.

Salappa received the State's Rajyotsava Award in 1992, the same year he was nominated member of the Railway Recruitment Board. He became vice-chairman of the National Safai Karamchari Commission in 1995. Salappa died in Sept 14, 1996. He was posthumously given the Babu Jagajivan Ram Award in 2003.

When then Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda visited Jagajivan Ram Nagar to pay his condolences to the bereaved family, he was awed by Salappa's humble family home where he lived and died.

....(By N Bhanutej)