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Hundreds of Mahadalit families have fled their village in Gaya district along with their cattle and other belongings out of fear from upper caste strongmen. The frightened Mahadalit families have taken shelter in a government building, five kilometers from the village, and are under police protection.

On Friday, despite the government official's assuring them full security the terrified families were reluctant to return to their village fearing threat to their life.

Over 250 families of Mahadalit community had fled from Pura under Tekari police station of Gaya district on Thursday fearing repeated threat from the upper caste strongmen of the village.

The upper caste villagers had threatened the Mahadalit families to leave the village or to face dire consequences. Defying their diktat, a member of the Mahadalit community, Vakil Manjhi had filed his nomination papers for the election of president to the Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society (PACS) against Uday Shankar Sharma, the upper caste candidate.

Later, when Manjhi refused to withdraw his nomination papers the upper caste strongmen allegedly caught hold of his brother Arjun Manjhi and beat him to death on September 20 and threatened others to leave the village or face the same consequences.

"When we protested the killing and lodged a case against the perpetrators they threatened us and asked us to leave the village or face the bloody consequences," said Nitay Manjhi, son of deceased Arjun Manjhi. For five days the local police took no action which forced the villagers to leave the village on Thursday.

Later, top administrative officials reached the spot and requested the families to return to the village with full police security and safety. But, they preferred to take shelter in a government

building of the Tekari bloc office where they were provided food and other facilities by the district officials.

A case was lodged against six people at local Tekari police station.

“One accused was arrested on Thursday and three others surrendered in court on Friday under intense police pressure,” Nishant Tiwari, Gaya SSP, told *The Hindu*. The other two absconding accused too would be arrested soon, he added.

A police camp has also been set up in the village to instill confidence among the villagers.

Earlier, the Mahadalit families submitted a list of demands through the local MLA, Dr Anil Kumar, to the district officials for their return to the village.

The incident, however, also triggered political reaction as the Lok Janshakti Party [LJP] chief and Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan on Friday demanded resignation of Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi.

The CM himself belongs to the Mahadalit community and hails from Gaya district. Back from his London visit he is expected to visit Gaya on Saturday to attend the International Buddhist Conclave.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/threat-triggers-exodus-of-mahadalits-from-bihar-village-four-sent-to-jail/article6452115.ece>