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**MLAs narrate untouchability stories, Assembly touched**

BENGALURU, DHNS: Caste discrimination hit Dr K Srinivas-murthy of the JD(S), a Dalit, when he contested his first election in 2008 from Nela-mangala that he lost.

"During canvassing, a man said that Nagaraj (my oppo-nent of the BJP) was a toucha-ble and hence, he should be al-lowed inside homes and given votes. He said I was untoucha-ble, so I shouldn't be allowed inside. This was the same man who had broken his hips and got operated by me at a cost of Rs15,000-20,000. This is my experience," Srinivas-murthy told the Assembly on Friday.

He was among several SC/ST MLAs who shared their own stories of untouchability, a practice they say is still in vogue. And these anecdotes came pouring out during a special discussion on the Con-stitution, no less.

"My own son, who is study-ing to become a doctor, faced discrimination," JD(S) Ma-lavalli legislator K Annadani said. "One day, a female

friend with whom he was close, asked about his caste. My son has no ill feeling about this and he told her he was SC. From the very next day, she stopped talking to him," he said. "Discrimination is only increasing. It's easy to sit here and say it's not happening."

The trigger for the MLAs to narrate these stories was BSP's N Mahesh's own recol-lection of the discrimination he had seen. "In the 1990s, piped drinking water supply had just started in my village," he said. "In a kind of innocent atrocity, women would use tamarind and salt to clean vessels because Dalits also drew water from the same borewell. One Dalit woman wanted to file a case but I asked her to clean her vessels with tamarind and salt as well," the Kollegal MLA said.

Congress' J N Ganesh said many hotels still serve water to SC/STs in separate glasses. Hubli-Dharwad (East) MLA Abbayya Prasad concurred.

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"In and around Dharwad and Gadag, in the Nayakka-nur village, for example, Dal-its are given separate glasses," he said.

JD(S) Kolar MLA K Srin-ivas Gowda went back to his school days. "When I was in middle school, I had an SC friend named Anjinappa," he said.

"One day, his mother pre-pared fish saaru and it smelled so good that I was tempted. His mother didn't want me to come in, but my friend didn't bother. I was washing hands after eating when my father,

who was walking by the fields, saw me. I was so afraid that I climbed up a height and re-fused to descend until I was as-sured that I wouldn't get into trouble," he said. "This was some 50 years ago when caste discrimination was high. But if it continues to this day, our heads must hang in shame."

Discrimination, either di-rect or indirect, is a reality in over 70% of India's villages, Mahesh said. "In Karnata-ka, there are 51 MLAs and 5 MPs who are elected from reserved constituencies. We can come to this House only because of the Constitution and Ambedkar's struggle," he said.