News



Jose Kavi

Contributing editor

View Author Profile

Matters India

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

New Delhi, India — August 3, 2018

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Catholics in a south Indian diocese want their bishop removed for allegedly misappropriating diocesan funds to lead a luxurious life with his wife and son.

Bishop Prasad Gallela of Cuddapah, however, has denied the charges as baseless and aimed at tarnishing his image.

Aggrieved Catholics filed a criminal complaint in a trial court in Andhra Pradesh state seeking action against the 56-year-old prelate after their efforts to get justice from the Vatican failed, Mesa Ravi Kumar, one of the two complaints in the case, told Matters India Aug. 3, a day after appearing before the court. He had filed the complaint in the court in June this year.

The case came up for hearing before the court of Second Additional District Judge, Kadapa (new name of Cuddapah) at Proddatur on August 2. The prelate’s lawyer has sought more time to file a detailed reply to the charges leveled against him.

The other complainant is Byreddy Chinnappa Reddy, a 65-year-old farmer.

Kumar, a 40-year-old college lecturer and president of Christian Dalit Forum for Kadapa district, said several people, including him, had sent registered letters to the Vatican narrating Gallela's alleged illegal activities, including "his immoral life with his wife and son."

"A female lawyer Chandravati had written to the Vatican in November 2016 demanding the ouster of Bishop Gallela for the charges but to no avail," Kumar said.

He also said that he and T.P. Radhika had sent similar letters in May this year to the Vatican urging Pope Francis to act against the prelate to save the diocese from disintegration as many Catholics have stopped attending Mass and going for confession.

Kumar says the bishop, whose son is now 20 years old, spends less than one week in a month in his diocese. "The rest of the time [he] is believed to be spending with his family, as no one knows about his whereabouts during this period," he alleged.

Matters India contacted few priests in the diocese, who confirmed that the bishop has a family, but they requested that their names not be used. They too said the bishop spends less tha a week per month at the bishop’s house and that nobody knows how he spends the rest of the time.

In an email to Matters India, Gallela disowned a letter purportedly written by him to priests in his diocese. The July 16 letter bearing the bishop's signature acknowledges his family and makes allegations against other bishops in Andhra Pradesh.

"This is not true. I have not written any such letter, and I informed the 4 bishops about it. ... It is all false. It is a cybercrime. Someone has done it. It is forged signature. Please understand that and punish the culprit," Gallela said in an email response to queries July 28.

Advertisement

The prelate later said he had filed a police complaint about the letter and informed the superintendent of police about it. He has not responded to Matters India's request to share content of the complaint.

Gallela also declined to answer repeated questions about the other allegations made against him.

He was ordained a priest in 1989 and a bishop nine years later.

Kumar asserts that he has "reliable government documents" that identify the bishop as the husband of the woman and the father of the boy, who is now in a college.

Archbishop Thumma Bala of Hyderabad has been named in the complaint for failing to act agasint Gallela, Kumar said.

Bala told Matters India Aug. 3 tha he had appointed a lawyer to deal with the case. "I am not even aware why I am made party to it," he said.

He confirmed that he met with a delegation of 15 Catholic lay leaders July 30 at his residence, and they urged him to remove Gallela.

"Yes, I got their complaint," he said, but added that he does not have any power to deal with such issues. "I will forward it to nunciature for appropriate action," he said.

K. Papi Reddy, a member of the delegation, said they approached the archbishop as they cannot accept a married man with a child as their bishop.

"Our forefathers and great missionaries built up the diocese from scratch, and we cannot remain idle and see it brought to shambles," the retired school headmaster told Matters India.

Reddy too said they have sufficient evidence "that proved unequivocally our bishop is a married man and cheating the believers since a decade and ruining our diocese."

He said they want the bishop removed to help "protect the sanctity of the institution of Catholic Church and its holy sacraments."

[Jose Kavi is editor of Matters India.]