

Murder of Sukhjinder Singh and Human Rights Violation in Punjab Village

Violating the basic rights of the dalit in Punjab is a routine affair for the land owning community. Dalits are landless agricultural laborers and are dependent on the land owning communities which are from the upper caste community. Therefore in spite of many ghastly treatment, the dalits are compelled to accept quietly these human rights violations as their fate. The murder of Sukhjinder Singh alias Sipahia *Khemkaran* is one of the examples which represent the condition of Dalits in Punjab.

Khemkaran a town which is 65 kilometers from Amritsar and situated near Khemkaran Kasoor border known as K.K. border. Sukhjinder Singh alias Sipahia was a manual laborer who used to earn 60- 80 rupees per day was working in Bhorda Singh's land. Bhorda belongs to a high and dominant caste and very influential person in the village. He recently installed a hand pump for irrigation purposes. Sipahia actually bored the hand pump in Bhorda Singh's house roughly three months back for which he was not paid. Whenever he asked for his wages Bhorda refused to pay the wages and make excuses for the same.

On the evening of 14 May 2008, Sipahia called the land owner by his name to pay his wages which was about Rs. 350/- (near about 8 dollars). Bhorda felt very bad; how a person from the dalit community can call him by his name which in fact according to Bhorda is an insult, challenging his dignity of being Zamindars. So he decided to teach a lesson to Sipahia. He sought the help of five more persons and mobilized them. On the fateful day, carrying lethal weapons like swords, lathis & sticks Bhorda and his gang forcibly entered into the house and pulled Sipahia out and started thrashing him and kept on beating till he took his last breath. It was in the evening about 4 pm.

Hearing this atrocious reaction of Bhorda and his gang, dalits from the "Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan" –a peoples' organization gathered at the house of Sipahia and approached the local police station at Khemkaran.

First the local police did not take any action and refused to register the FIR against the diabolic murder, rather they showed a very lukewarm response. The local SHO tried play down the incident and asked the people to enter into a compromise and cremate the body without post mortem and further enquiry. The police officials did not register the case till the next day. Subsequently murder of a dalit spread like a wildfire in Khemkaran and to near by villages also.

On fifteenth morning near about 800 to 1000 people from the "Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan" peoples organization under the leadership of Satnam Singh, Chamanlal and Kaka Singh, gathered together shouted slogans and protested against the atrocity and the criminal nexus of the police and murder. Bittu Masih (SEDP Staff) and priest in-charge Rev. Patras Masih also mobilized the more people as an expression of solidarity. Dalit people along with the SEDP

Staff surrounded the Police Station staged a *dharna* and demanded that a FIR should be registered under Indian Penal Code u/s 302 for murder and arrest the culprits immediately. Awaz-E-Avam, the advocacy cell of SEDP also got involved, lobbying with the authorities. The pressure put by the advocacy cell could make the police to take some action. An F.I.R. u/s 302(I.P.C) was registered against six accused, but no arrest was made. People could not bear such lackluster behavior of the police, lost their temper, broke their silence and started brick batting, pelted stone on the police station. The situation went out of control, the police started running around.

After this instance the police immediately came into action and rang the senior superintendent of Police and official, they all reached to the police station within 15 minutes and started negotiations with the leaders, as well SEDP staff and within 30 minutes two main accused were arrested. The senior police officers came to the spot and the matter was discussed. They assured the people that appropriate action will be taken against all the accused and will not be spared. The People from the 'Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan' continued to maintain their pressure. Ultimately in spite of political pressure and high handedness, the police had to take action against the culprits. It was a victory of people's organizations. Out of six accused, five accused belonging from the upper class/caste-land owning community were arrested and one is still absconding.

It is worth mentioning here that relatives of the accused started threatening the people who were taking lead. They also tried to purchase the witnesses but could not succeed. The case is pending with the Court but the threatening calls are being received by the leaders, SEDP workers, the local Priest and village leaders continuously. But the people are determined to get the justice.

The women leaders from the villages have took active part in leading and pressurizing the authorities. This murder of Sukhjinder Singh (Sipahia) and the subsequent protest of the people has strengthened their unity, belongingness and renewed their zeal to fight against the oppressive systems demanding justice and rights for Dalits and other oppressed. The "Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan" has decided that they will not let such thing happen in future and resist the injustice, oppressive and de-humanizing forces and systems operating having a say in their life.

Report By

Nikhil Kumar

Program Associate

CNI-RCSA for Livelihood and Food Security, Agra