



Thar peasants' murder

Fact-finding team casts doubt on investigation

By Our Correspondent

UMERKOT, July 7: Head of a fact-finding team who visited Thathrai village, 10km from here on Wednesday, to gather facts about murder of three scheduled caste peasants by a landlord's son on Monday have expressed misgivings about police investigation.

According to police, Herchand accompanied by Loono went to meet his landlord Sain Bux Mangrio at his autaq (guest house) near his village and demanded his share in the harvest. Sain Bux flew into a rage and ordered his son Ali Ahmed alias Sadoro to kill them.

The peasants' relatives Ms Tulchhan, Ms Rajbai and Ms Phoolan rushed to the autaq on hearing gunshots and suffered injuries when they tried to save them. Herchand died on the spot and Loono and Ms Tulchhan died in hospitals.

Talking to journalists, the head of the team, Ashuthama of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said that a member of the police investigation team SPO Iqbal Mangrio who was relative of the accused, and some influential political figures of Mangrio community were protecting the accused.

The fact-finding team, which comprises representatives of the HRCP, National Coalition Against Bonded

Labour and some NGOs, interviewed heirs of the deceased, police officers, local politicians, journalists, social activists and father of the accused.

Dr Ashuthama demanded rehabilitation and compensation for the bereaved families and proper treatment of the wounded women.

Jalal Bheel, father of late Loono, told the team that Sadoro was not happy with his son's friendship with Herchand and he had issued threats of dire consequences to his son on many occasions.

He said that in the morning of that fateful day his son accompanied Herchand Oad to the landlord's autaq. When Herchand asked him to pay his share in the harvest he flew into a rage and opened fire at them, he said.

Lalchand Oad, son of Herchand, expressed the fear that the accused was at large and might attempt to kill other members of his family. They had therefore left their village and came to Umerkot. His father was killed as a punishment for demanding his rightful share in the harvest, he said.

He said that elders of Oad and Bheel communities would meet on Thursday to decide future line of action and finalise decision to take out a big rally in protest against police

failure to arrest the main accused.

The father of the accused Sain Bux Mangrio told the team that he was innocent. He was not present in the area that day and was attending a community meeting at that time, he claimed.

He said that he was informed by Herchand's neighbours that Herchand had lured his son to his house under a conspiracy where Loono and other youths of Oad community tied him up, subjected him to torture and also sexual assault, which might have compelled him to take such an extreme step.

If he was guilty he must be hanged, he added.

SPO Iqbal Mangrio, member of the investigation team formed by Umerkot DPO, told the team that they could not arrest the main accused because they were busy maintaining law and order in the town for two days and on Wednesday they kept waiting for the team.

He said that police had arrested co-accused Sain Bux Mangrio, father of the main accused, and also impounded their tractor and livestock.

SP (investigation) Gul Hassan Larik heads the investigation team and SIO Arif Bhatti is investigating officer of the case.

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Peasant family leaves village after triple murder

Friday, July 09, 2010

By By Jan Khaskheli

Karachi

It is a common phenomenon in Sindhi rural areas where landlords want peasants to allow them access to visit their families, which some times creates panic in the entire vicinity. However, upon resisting the landlord's wishes, the outcome is often gory and tragic.

This was the case when news of a triple murder in the desert district head quarter of Umarkot town suburbs broke out in public.

A landlord, Ali Ahmed alias Sadoro Mangrio, son of Sain Bakhsh Mangrio, traveled to Deeno Chang Village on Monday, and allegedly opened fire at a peasant family. A family elder, Herchand Oad, was killed on the spot, while three women, Tulchhan, Rajbai and Phoolan Oad, were injured.

Later, Tulchhan, the peasants' relative guest hailing from a nearby locality, also died.

The accused then tracked down a rickshaw driver, Loono Mal Bheel, who they believed had relations with the peasant girl, and killed him with the same weapon and fled. All the victims belonged to low-caste Dalits. Two other women who received bullet wounds on the scene have been hospitalised. No legislator from any party came to express solidarity with the victim families.

Relatives of the victim, 50-year-old Herchand Oad, have left every thing behind in Village Deeno Chang, including their homes, animals and belongings in fear and shifted to other places. Social activists were pouring in to makeshift settlements and going back, with assurances of moral support against the hostile landlords.

The courage among the local activists for condemning the killings was obvious. In this regard, Mir Hassan Areesar, leading an NGO in Umerkot, Sami Foundation, shared his observations and said area landlords become most hostile and threaten peasants when they ask for their 'crop share'.

He said their NGO have a list of such horrible incidents which have occurred in the neighbourhood in which pregnant women were attacked. Few innocent peasants were killed over the similar issue of asking about their crop share. A week earlier, he said, a landlord killed a peasant in Kunri and the poor relatives were compelled to remain silent.

The farmers, after the triple murder, feared they may be attacked again by these landlords and started mobilising oppressed peasant families to unite against this violent incident.

The police arrested Sain Bakhsh, 65, father of the accused, claiming that investigation is going on. SPO Iqbal Mangrio said initial inquiry reveals that the incident occurred after the peasants for asked their crop share, which irritated the landlord.

Sain Bakhsh, father of the accused standing in the police lock up told The News that he was unaware about the incident but according to his information he received from locals, "victims abused my son while he visited the family in the evening.

They beat him up and left him in an intolerable condition, which must have prompted him to take revenge." Bakhsh said he was unaware about the actual reason as he could not meet his son after the incident.

Zulfiqar Shah, joint director, Pakistan Institute of Labour, Education and Research (Piler) while commenting on the incident, said the killing of three peasants of Umarkot can not be justified at any cost. However, he said, the question is why the government is reluctant to follow the laws made to settle down disputes between landlords and farmers or why is it unable to ensure such incidents are not repeated. Shah said the peasant families are trapped and their dignity, lives and livelihood are at stake because the law is apparently unable to protect them from influential landlords.

A fact-finding mission led by Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HRCP) Sindh Taskforce Coordinator Dr Ashothama and others in their report said the government should activate district vigilance committees set up under the Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1992.

They demanded to review the Sindh Tenancy Act and make amendments to ensure the security of rights of peasants in the province. They said landlords, mostly associated with ruling parties are observed violating the laws, depriving poor farmers of their rights.

SCFP condemns killings of innocent Dalit peasants in Umerkot



Written by Our Correspondent

Sunday, 11 July 2010 08:00

UMERKOT: Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan (SCFP) has strongly condemned the cold-blood murder of three Dalit peasants at the hands of landlords in Sindh province's Umerkot district and demanded strong action against the culprits and measures to protect the vulnerable Dalit communities from the atrocities of landlords and elements practicing caste discrimination in the country.

In a press statement, on Sunday the SCFP President Surendar Valasai said that such atrocities and attacks against the Dalit folks in the country would be condemned with heavy voice and protests against the killings of innocent Dalit peasants will be spread to whole of the provinces.

The SCFP also took notice of displacing of 150 Dalit families from Karachi's Dalmia and Shanti Nagar areas. The residents of Dalit hamlets were forced by the armed gangs to leave their abodes on gun-point.

Surendar Valasai said that SCFP would continue to raise the voice for the victimized, discriminated and oppressed Dalit communities of Pakistan and urged the civil society to rise against the growing atrocities against the Dalit communities in the country, who have already been deprived of their economic, political and social rights and are being subjected to untouchability, human inequality and caste discrimination in an Islamic society.

He quoted the saying of Babasaheb Ambedkar, that "Freedom of mind is the real freedom. A person, whose mind is not free though he may not be in chains, is a slave, not a free man. One, whose mind is not free, though he may not be in prison, is a prisoner and not a free man. One whose mind is not free though alive, is no better than dead. Freedom of mind is the proof of one's existence."

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