

Pakistan: A Hindu worker is lynched for blasphemy as punishment for loving a Muslim girl

A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

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A 27 year old Hindu worker, Mr. Jagdesch Kumar was killed by fellow Muslim workers on the charge of blasphemy in the presence of more than two dozen policemen including an officer. The police and factory management made no attempt to stop the factory workers killing the young man. Some reports suggest that the victim was in love with a Muslim girl which was what angered the Muslim workers who also called for help from outside the factory. The sad truth of the fact is that no political group, even, the one in power has started to investigate the incident or provide security to the Hindu community, who are under tremendous threat and insecurity by some fundamentalist Muslim groups.

According to the information collected, Mr. Jagdesch Kumar belonged to a lower Hindu caste and his family lives in Mirpurkhas, a city close to India bordering the Rajesthan estate. Jagdesch came to Karachi city, the capital city of Sindh province, for a better job some years ago and joined the NOVA leather factory Korangi, Karachi, which has 7000 workers about 60 of which are Hindu. Jagdesch was very close to a Muslim girl who worked at the factory but supervisory staff and some workers, who are members of Islamic fundamentalists groups were not happy with the close relationship which developed between Jagdesch and the Muslim girl. The relationship showed every promise of turning into a lifetime partnership.

On the day of the incident, April 8, 2008, at 10am some workers and security guards beat Jagdesch and warned him not to "involve himself in so many things". They told him that he must remain simply a Hindu worker. After beating him he was produced before Ms. Naushaba, the supervisor of the stitching department where he was working, and Jagdesch was accused of saying bad words against the Muslim prophet, which he denied instantly. But Ms. Naushaba, who was aware of his relationship with the girl just softly, slapped his face and told him to start work. So at that point things were quite normal, but at 11.30 am some people from the workers of a religious group started beating him again and after some minutes the security guards of the factory locked him in a security room which had iron gates. The workers who had beaten him, started shouting that Jagdesch was using bad words against Islam.

In the meantime Mr. Irfan Iqbal, the director of NOVA, along with his managers, Mr. Nadeem, and Mr. Saleem, arrived at the scene and in their presence the mob, believing that they had the support of the management, broke the iron gates of the room, dragged Jagdesch out and beat him with heavy rods, stones and hammers. The management watched the incident without interfering. In the meantime some people called the police and initially only four policemen turned up in a police jeep. Later they were followed by two more jeeps carrying officers who all stood by and watched the

lynching. The police and the management remained spectators while the beating continued from 11.30 to 12.10 inside the factory compound. Witnesses from the Hindu community, residing at Lyari town, reported that even when the fanatics drove screwdrivers into Jagdesh's eyes neither the police nor the management intervened. When Jagdesh was finally handed over to the police he was dead. The police refused to enter a First Information Report (FIR) by the family of the victim, but later on filed their own FIR after one day had passed.

Jagdesh was beaten beyond recognition and as a result his body was not shown to his mother, who is still in a state of semi unconsciousness. The family was first pressured by the management of the factory and police not to enter the case of killing by lynching. Then some Muslim religious groups persuaded the Hindu community residing in Marwari Mohalla, Lyari town, Karachi, not to file an FIR or report it to the press otherwise whole Hindu community, and particularly 60 Hindu workers working in the factory, will face more bloody incidents in the name of blasphemy charges. The management of the factory has since stopped sending its bus to cater for 40 Hindu workers from Marwari Mohalla. The Marwari Mohalla has a population of 2000 Hindus who are residing in more than 200 houses in a big compound. The members of the community are so scared that they locked themselves in the compound because of a Muslim fundamentalist sectarian group who is known as a militant organization.

The police have arrested three persons, two from Sunny Tehreek (ST), a militant sectarian organization, and one from the Pasbaan organization. However, the Korangi 4 police station is providing protection to the perpetrators by not arresting the other persons who were very much visible in the movie which recorded the whole incident with different cameras installed in and outside the factory. It is alleged that two arrested persons, Mr. Waqas and Mr. Usman of Sunny Tehreek, are notorious and have been involved in cases of murder, attempt to murder, rape and other crimes, but are employed by the management of the factory. Mr. Sarwer Nadeem, the manager, along with these two persons is terrorizing the employees, particularly young women who are generally employed on piece rates. The third arrested person, Mr. Hashim Makrani, belongs to Pasbaan, also a religious organization. There is a 300 strong group of ST members in the factory.

It is believed that the police are destroying the evidence against the other perpetrators and arrested persons. The Korangi 4 police station has appointed Mr. Ulfat Husain, Assistant Sub Inspector, as investigating officer who is very close to the management of the factory. On the other side, the factory management is saying that there is no video recording of the incident as their cameras were not working at that time.

One day before his killing, Waqas and Usman and some other persons from ST threatened Jagdesh not to come back to the factory otherwise he would face exemplary punishment. Jagdesh complained about this threat to his seniors, particularly his supervisor, but no action was taken.

The provincial government of Sindh has still not started an investigation into this incident. When contacted, the Minister on Minority Affairs, Mr. Daya Ram, he said he had heard about the case but did not have detailed information. Later, he said that he had informed the prime minister about the incident and the PM assured him that he would look into the case. After the passing of many days, neither the minister nor the provincial government has done anything in the case. Even the Pakistan Peoples' Party, a secular party in power, is also not taking up the case or even issued a statement because of the involvement of powerful religious groups which the Party does not want to annoy.

Different Muslim religious parties including, Sunny Tehreek, Jamat e Islami, have acknowledged the incident but other than condemn the matter, have not taken any action. This is the same situation with different NGOs who claim to represent civil society but whom, as yet, have not issued any press statements. Only the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has issued a statement.

The dark aspect of the incident is that extreme, militant Muslim organizations will use the tool of blasphemy as the best way to keep religious minority groups under pressure. This will continue if the state does not rein in the misuse of the blasphemy law. The conspicuously indifferent attitude of the coalition government of the Pakistan Peoples' Party and Pakistan Muslim League-N, on the issue of killing a young man just because he was in love with a Muslim girl, will turn country into an intolerant society and no one, not even the political parties, will be spared by the militant groups.

The government of the Prime Minister, Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, should immediately probe this case of the killing of a young Hindu man on the charges of blasphemy. The government must take action before the formation of a probe commission by judges from higher courts. The police officers and the factory management that stood by and watched this young man being beaten to death must be brought before the law and punished accordingly.

The demand for a probe commission consisting of judges from higher courts is very much pertinent as the incident is of a heinous crime where the government and state has remained inactive. This will be a test case in which the newly elected government will either show its commitment for the rule of law or adopt the course of political expediency.