

FACT FINDING REPORT

Khairlanji Massacre: A collection of reports

A VJAS Press release

Kherlanji Buddhist family Massacred

Small village in Bhandara district in Maharashtra has been focus of attention when four member of one dalit family was slaughtered on 29th September 29th, 2006 in bhandara district. Victims are Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange's wife surekha, 44, his daughter priyanka, 18, sons, roshan, 23, and sudhir, 21. The fact finding team of vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti visited on 6th October to village kherlanji to know the details of this barbaric killing and they were shocked to learn that , Bhaiyyalal's wife surekha, 44, his daughter priyanka, 18, sons, roshan, 23, and sudhir, 21, were first stripped naked, dragged from their hut to the choupal 500 meters away and hacked to death by the entire village of the so called upper-castes. vJAS has moved with the fact finding committee report to national human rights commission(nhrc) for independent probe of this dalit massacred as all political parties and local administration are covering up the matter as till date no mla or mp from bhandara has visited the village or Bhaiyyalal, more than a week after the gruesome killing took place. Two mlas from Nagpur, ostensibly sent by the congress higher-ups, visited kherlanji, but did not make any noise. The police are not acting fast and the only two prime witnesses are under threat. Not a single villager's statement has been recorded. Neighboring villages are living with fear and terror, especially the minority lower castes dalit to dared to demand the right of land were slaughtered in order to give other dalit in villages of Mowadi taluka of bhandara district .

As per the fact finding report dispute of dalit killing is portion land owned by Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange's wife "surekha's only fault was that she'd challenged the village upper-castes and that too the landlords. And she'd dared to crave for self-esteem and dignity," as told by a broken Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, 50, a dalit farmer, a shadow of himself today. LAST week, he helplessly saw brutality and barbarism knock on his door and wipe off his family – his wife and three children. His worst fears came true September 29.

As kherlanji wears ghostly silence, ostensibly sheltering injustice, Bhaiyyalal packs up his house – a cramped hut with nothing in it actually – to move in with his in-laws at Deulgaon village, 20 km away. But fear and terror emanates from his swollen eyes, mirroring the truth that the entire government administration, the police and the political class are fighting hard to cover up for a week now.

But the kherlanji's bestiality is too hard to be suppressed. As per details provided all relatives to the fact finding committee the barbaric details are Bhaiyyalal's wife surekha, 44, his daughter priyanka, 18, sons, roshan, 23, and sudhir, 21, were first stripped naked, dragged from their hut to the choupal 500 meters away and hacked to death by the entire village of the so called upper-castes, but not before demonstrating the savagery that sends shivers down the spine of a mauled Bhaiyyalal, the lone survivor and fallen family's headman.

The meek farmer is yet to come to terms with the incident that he witnessed from some distance hiding behind a hut. He's broken and shudders every moment, uncertain of his life, confused and fearful. It has been a week but nobody has spoken to him from the government administration about the mass killing.

VJAS has drawn the attention of NHRC toward the fact that "Surekha and her daughter priyanka were humiliated, bitten, beaten black and blue and then gang-raped in full public view for an hour before they fell dead. "The marauders had pushed sticks into their private parts," says a policeman, asking not to be named. The two sons were kicked and stabbed repeatedly. The assaulters then mutilated their private parts too, disfigured their faces and tossed them in air before the twosome lay dead on the ground. "When the dusk had settled, four bodies of this dalit family lay strewn at the village choupal, with the killers pumping their fists and still kicking the bodies. The rage was not over. Some angry men even raped the badly mutilated corpses of the two women."

"not a single woman, save one, from the village tried to intervene or stop their men from doing it," cries Bhaiyyalal. "i was too terrified to run to their help." Intriguingly, the post-mortem report says surekha and priyanka were not raped. "Doctors were managed, and the police bribed," alleges Rashtrapal Narnaware, Surekha's nephew. "Every one in kherlanji knows what happened with my aunt and cousins, every one was a witness to the heinous crime," he says furiously. The police now await the report of second autopsy that was done on October 5 by a team of doctors after exhuming the bodies buried at Deulgaon following mounting pressure. Police admit the bodies were without even a shred of cloth. Bhaiyyalal says the kherlanji villagers, who perpetrated the crime, called for a village meeting an hour after the incident with bodies still lying on the road and issued a 'fatwa' that nobody would open their mouth about the incident. in kherlanji, villagers don't speak. "They won't," says a policeman sent here to maintain 'law and order' situation. "But frankly," he says, "the incident shows that there was no law and no order for years; there isn't any even today." Police say the assaulters threw the bodies at different places in the periphery of the village. Priyanka body was recovered from a canal only the next afternoon, and that was how the matter came to light. But the police and administration, dictated by a political regime that sensed deep trouble, saw to it that even the dalit leaders kept mum, as the incident would have been explosive during the October 2 dhammakranti anniversary programme at Nagpur's Deekshabhoomi. Kherlanji is a village of 780 people – about 170 households, some 50 km north of bhandara town off the Tumsar road. From Nagpur, it would be about 120 km. It falls in Mohadi Tehsil. The Bhotmange's were one of the two Mahar families of the village that is dominated by the OBC's, the landlord clans here. Bhaiyyalal had moved to this village to farm his mother's 5-acre land about 18 years ago. But it was surekha, who tilled her farm and fought for regaining the hold over a portion grabbed by the upper castes, which is a decisive political force in this part. A cramped hut of the Bhotmange's stands proof of their abject poverty. Despite that, surekha toiled hard to send her children to school and then colleges. Priyanka, a NCC cadet who dreamt of joining the armed forces, was preparing for her HSC this year, Bhaiyyalal wails. "My wife saved some money last year and bought her a bicycle," he tells us. "She was very intelligent." The two sons helped them in farming and earned extra money by working as

laborers. “Routinely the villagers drove tractors over our standing crop.” “Surekha,” says her inconsolable sister Sudan raul, “was taught a lesson because she fought for her land. She feared their end was nearing.” just a week ago, says Sudan, surekha came with her daughter to visit us, and said the villagers would not spare them. But no one had ever imagined such a shocking end. “Not one of her children could survive,” says Drupata bai, Surekha’s old mother, with her eyes fixed on the ground. “Did the murderers not have a heart?” The plot was meticulously planned. First, the village heads tarnished her character. They propagated that she had illicit relation with the police-patil of neighboring Dhusala village Siddhartha Gajbhiye, who was actually her cousin. Siddhartha, a dalit too, was the only person who stood by this family. The district superintendent of police, Suresha Sagar, holds: “this incident is the height of brutality.” He clears surekha had no illicit relations with Siddhartha. He admits the andhalgaon police did not attend to the calls of the Bhotmanges, or investigate the crime immediately after the incident. Siddhartha had in fact made a desperate call to the police station when he learnt that the Bhotmange’s were being slaughtered. “the call was made around 6.15 pm,” says Bhaiyyalal. 32 persons have been arrested so far. Many more arrests would follow. As of now, the main perpetrators are still free, say the deulgaon villagers. The SP reveals he is issuing the suspension orders to a PSI and a head constable at Andhalgaon police station, under which the village falls. But the police lapses seem far more and too grave. The police had refused to lodge the complaints of the Bhotmange’s for over a decade now. That is since the woman took up the cudgels to recover the lost portion of land. they clearly sided with the landlords, says Rashtrapal, and that was the reason why even Siddhartha went to Kamptee and got himself admitted to a private hospital after being beaten almost fatally by the kherlanji village lords on September 3. That was the provocation of the latest tension that culminated into the September 29 mayhem. The things had come to a boil. “The villagers had pronounced that killing a mere Mahar family of the village wouldn’t harm any of them,” alleges Bhaiyyalal, fighting hard his tears, as he recounts living in years of the village-regression. Siddhartha’s younger brother Rajendra took him to Kamptee in nagpur district, 100 km from the village, because he knew it was safer. “here, it would have been too risky for him,” says Siddhartha’s son Rahul, who’s doing his engineering from a private college at Ramtek. The doctors at the private hospital realized that this was a police case, and then referred him to the government hospital at Kamptee. The Kamptee police lodged an offence and referred the case back to the bhandara police for investigation. THAT was when the offences were registered against 14 persons of kherlanji, and when the police paraded the accused for identification, surekha and Bhaiyyalal identified them, notwithstanding the reigning threat of a village-goon and one of the masterminds of the heinous crime. On the morning of September 29 the 14 persons were arrested and produced before a Mohadi court and released on bail. No sooner had they been set free than the persons first drove down to Kandri, a village ten km from kherlanji, in search of Rajendra and Siddhartha. But when they did not find them, they rushed to their village baying for the blood of the Bhotmange’s. When they reached the hut of the dalit family, they found surekha and her children preparing the evening meal; Bhaiyyalal was not at home. They were armed with sharp weapons and sticks, informs Bhaiyyalal, who was at a stone’s throw away distance when the assaulters were dragging his children and wife having stripped them off their clothes. Rajendra was with him. And they both witnessed the murderous assault unfurl

before them over the next one-and-a-half hour or more, before the two slipped out in to darkness to safety. NHRC has been asked to order independent probe of this dalit massacred and sack the collector in charge of the district. Appropriate compensation to tune of Rs.25 lacs is also demanded by VJAS to NHRC.

DNA Reports-

Killed for speaking up

Jaideep Hardikar

Saturday, October 07, 2006 22:49 ISTKHERLANJI(Bhandara)

“Surekha’s fault was that she had challenged the village upper-caste landlords,” says Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, 50, a dalit farmer. On September 29, he was witness to his wife and children being brutally hacked to death, in full view of his entire village. Their fault: His wife had dared to fight for possession of a portion of their farm, which was grabbed by the landlords. While Bhaiyyalal has moved in with his in-laws at Deulgaon village, 20 kms away, Kherlanji wears a ghostly silence. The state administration, police and the political class, on their part, have been fighting hard to cover up the ghastly act for a week now. Bhaiyyalal’s wife Surekha, 44, daughter Priyanka, 18, sons, Roshan, 23, and Sudhir, 21, were first stripped naked, dragged from their hut to an open ground and hacked to death. He witnessed the killings from behind a hut where he was hiding. He now fears for his life too. Surekha and Priyanka were beaten and gang-raped in full public view for an hour before they fell dead. “Sticks were pushed into their private parts,” says a policeman, asking not to be named. The sons were stabbed repeatedly and their private parts mutilated. Intriguingly, the post-mortem report says the women were not raped. “Doctors were managed and the police bribed,” alleges Rashtrapal Narnaware, a cousin. The police now await the report of a second autopsy by a team of doctors, who exhumed the bodies on October 5, following pressure. Bhaiyyalal says the Kherlanji villagers have issued a ‘fatwa’ against anybody who opens their mouth about the incident. The district SP Suresha Sagar, said: “This incident is the height of brutality.” Surekha had testified against the villagers who had assaulted her cousin for supporting her fight in getting back their portion of land. This had led to the villagers’ arrest, who avenged the humiliation after getting bail.

source: DNA news service

A piece by Prashant Tambe & Alpana Bose

What is a caste? What does it mean to belong to a “lower” caste? Does this fact influence the way you live or the way you dream? In the Indian context, the painful fact is that yes, it does! The problem is still bleeding after the 60 years of independence and 56 years declaration of Republic India. The Indian constitution makes it punishable for anybody to discriminate on the basis on caste, colour and creed. In spite of that the caste-based atrocities on dalits or erstwhile untouchables are still continuing. The data on Indian economy gives a very rosy picture that India is on the way to become the economic superpower and soon we will be developed country. Many economists have tried to establish the inverse relationship between improving economic status and the caste based discrimination. They claim that as the economic status would improve, it would improve the social status too.

For many years we have cherished the idea that casteism is not what it used to be. Today nobody faces discrimination on the basis of her caste. There is reservation for the socially backward classes, we are slowly nearing the much desired equity and special laws and provisions are in place against those you practice untouchability or discrimination. While instances of caste based hatred kept trying to draw our attention every once in a while, we continued to believe what we wanted to. The Bhotmange family of Khairlanji village of Bhandara, however, knew the truth all along. Being the only “lower” caste Buddhist household in a village of “upper” caste people was never easy and fear was a part of life.

It was not unusual for this Dalit family or Buddhist one to face day-to-day caste based abuses from the villagers who were mostly from other religions and was in majority as far as the religious composition of the village is concerned. The village has 248 households of which only one belong to Buddhist (scheduled caste). The family had five acres of land and was living happily with that. The five member family with their two college going sons of which one was blind & one college going daughter were socially and geographically secluded from the village. The family as is seen in many other villages in India also, was living on the outskirts of the village thanks to the legacy of untouchability in India where lower caste people were not allowed to reside inside the village.

It all started with the conflict over the five acres of land owned by the Bhotmange family. The so-called upper caste people in the village could not digest the reality that a Dalit family is living on their own with self-esteem. The men and women of the village from upper caste families would abuse the women members of Bhotmange family everyday. This would have continued till their death had they not protested against the dictatorship of some of the mighty people of the village. The village head had his agricultural land adjacent to the agricultural land of Bhotmange family. The family was asked to give up some of their land for the approach road to the agriculture land of village head. The family accepted this demand, but the demand of land for the road did not stop there and the Bhotmange family was asked to give up more and more land. This grew and two acres of the family’s land was encroached upon by the villagers.

Going through the caste and religious composition of the nearby villages, one finds that there are Buddhists families in the nearby villages but they are in minority in their respective villages. These Buddhist families consider Mr. Siddharth who lives in a nearby village and one of the relatives of Bhotmange family as a leader. Siddharth used to come to Bhotmange family often, as Mr. Bhotmange was his brother-in-law. Feeling the security from the regular presence of Siddharth, Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange claimed his lost land from the villagers and farm the entire five acre of land this year. This antagonized the higher caste villagers and they decided to teach bhaiyyalal a lesson. Its not that Bhaiyyalal was not aware that he will have to face retaliation, but the hatred would express itself in this most brutal way he might not have imagined even in his worst nightmares.

Angry with Siddharth and the audacity of the Buddhist family, with encouragement from Siddharth, villagers banned the entry of Siddharth to the village Khairlanji. This was

done under the false premise that Siddharth was having an affair with bhaiyyalal's wife. However not complying the ban Siddharth came to village and was beaten up by the villagers. Bhaiyyalal and his wife testified in front of the police about the culprits involved in this act. The guilty were arrested and were sent to jail.

On the gory day the culprits came back to the village as they got a bail. Under influence of liquor they threatened the Bhotmange family and left in search for Siddharth and his brother. Sensing the threat to the life of her father, the daughter rushed to a neighbouring village for help, where she met Siddharth and her father and told them about the incident. Siddharth and Bhaiyyalal asked her to go back to village and assured her that they will come by another road. When this duo returned, from the very outskirts they heard villagers shouting and sounds of screams and cries from their home. Villagers were asking the whereabouts of them and was beating and thrashing the family members. Sensing the threat the duo ran away.

The nightmare that followed cannot be described in words. The most inhuman, shameful and brutal act came to life the morning of 29th September 2006. Four members of the households Surekha (44, the mother), Priyanka (18, daughter), Roshan and Sudhir (23, 21 sons, one of whom was blind) were dragged out of their household by a mob of about 40 people, which included women. They were beaten mercilessly, were stripped naked and paraded through the village streets to the main choupal of the village. As can be imagined, both the women were gang raped by all the men of the village. Brutality saw its height when the brothers were asked to do the same to their sister. The stunned boys refused to do this and as a punishment, their penises were cut off. "Punishment" for the women was insertion of bamboo rods into the private parts. Chilli powder was then smeared on the wounds to increase the suffering and embarrassment. The pleadings and cries that issued from the lips of the victims went not only unheard, but were also mocked at. As if not satisfied by this brutality, the boys were thrown up in the air and allowed to fall on the ground repeatedly until they breathed their last. The women also died apparently due to excessive bleeding.

This nightmare went on for over two hours before the victims were finally dead. After this the four bodies were disposed of at different places. Bhaiyyalal says the Kherlanji villagers have issued a 'fatwa' against anybody who opens their mouth about the incident.

It is reported that the police officials were informed about the possible attack. What police and politicians must have done is a matter of common sense. Govt. announced Rs.4,50,000 as a compensation to Bhaiyyalal the head and the only survivor of the Bhotmange family. As usual, acting late police arrested some people in the matter and the Buddhist families living in minority in the nearby villages are living under terror.

Was caste the reason behind this inhumanity? The answer unfortunately and obviously is yes! In an Indian village the "lower" caste people are supposed to be submissive and take gratefully whatever crumbs of humane behavior are thrown into their bowls by the "upper" castes. If they do not receive any, they have little to complain about as they

don't deserve it anyway! Things were outwardly fine as long as this submissiveness on the part of the lower castes existed. They were treated like animals and they considered themselves animals, not deserving of any better treatment. No conflicts!!

The day however arrived, owing to many factors, when these exploited human beings recognized themselves as human beings and refused to be treated like garbage any more. They demanded equal treatment; they wanted equal opportunities in their own right. The alms of mercy no longer satisfied them. That is when hatred and the feeling of loss of authority expresses itself in such outbursts of anger. This is wrong!

Friends, this is a black spot on our freedom and democracy and secularism. Every human being, irrespective of caste and race has been shamed by this act. Our naked bodies remind us of the brutality that the victims faced, the joy that we get out of sex reminds us of the cries of the hapless individuals, every morsel of food that goes down the throat reminds us of them. We cannot meet our own gaze in a mirror. Help us. Help humanity live.

You are requested to

Rise above your caste, creed, and religion and join the protest.

What can you do

- Send protesting mails to the national and international print and electronic media that has not publicized this matter
- Send mails to President, Human right commission, National women right commission, national and international NGOs and all the concerned.
- Send this mail to your friends and appeal them to do the same.

FIR Details of Kherlanji Case-

First Information report

No 0130209

FIR NO: 56/2006 Date 30/9/2006

Cr PC Sections: 147,148,149,302,201 (not applied 376(rape) nor 354(outraging modesty))

Atrocities Act: 3(1) (10)

Other Acts: Nil

Occurrence of event: Saturday from 30/9/2006

Time period: Morning From 8:30 before

Information received at Police station: 30/9/2006 **Time:** 20:40

General diary reference No: 28106/30/1/06 Time 20:40

Type of Information: Oral

Place of occurrence: 5Km South Vadegaon

Add: Nandgaon (Shivar) **Tah:** Mohadi **Dist:** Bhandara
Complainant Name: Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange **Age:**50 **Caste:**Mahar

1. Pic 1: Body of priyanka
2. Pic 2: another picture of priyanka after death
3. Pic 3: mother & son, covered for decency's sake
4. Pic 4: The hut of the Bhotmanges
5. Pic 5: things thrown around during the initial tussle
6. Pic 6: the cart on which mother and daughter were ferried naked