

Report of inquiry into mob lynching of Tabrez Ansari in Saraikela-Kharsawan (Jharkhand)

On 25 June 2019, a team of activists and representatives of organisations associated with the Jharkhand Janadhikar Mahasabha visited Kadamidiha and Dhatkidih villages in Kharsawan block (Saraikela-Kharsawan district, Jharkhand) to inquire into the mob lynching of Tabrez Ansari. The team comprised – Afzal Anees and Choudhary Obedullah (United Milli Forum and Aman Biradri), Adv. Mumtaz, Jyoti Kumari and Rajesh Kumar (Advocates, HRLN), Ambika Yadav, Ashok Verma, Ghanshyam Mahto and Siraj Dutta. The team met the immediate family members of Tabrez Ansari, their neighbours and some villagers of Dhatkidih village. The team could not meet the police and hospital officials due to shortage of time. Testimony of Tabrez’s uncle regarding the details of the incident and lapses in the responsibilities discharged by the local police and hospital can be seen here - <https://youtu.be/fB9KwJc5we4>

Incident (based on statements of immediate family members of Tabrez Ansari and neighbours)

Tabrez Ansari and his wife were staying at his in-laws’ house in Behrasai village in Kharsawan since a few days preceding 17 June. He had gone to his relative’s place in Jamshedpur on 17 June with two 14-year old boys of his village – Irfan and Umar Ali. According to Tabrez’s uncle, Tabre and the two boys went on a bike to Jamshedpur. It was not Tabrez’s bike. Perhaps it was Irfan’s or Umar’s bike. At around 10 pm, he called his wife to say that he was coming back from Jamshedpur. He did not return that night. In the morning, she got a call from him in which he told her that he was being beaten in Dhatkidih village and pleaded her to help him. She informed his immediate family members – his uncles Maksud Alam and Masrur Alam.

They went to the local thana to look for him. They could not find him in the Kharsawan thana and then went to Saraikela thana. Tabrez was in the lockup. They found him to be severely injured. He was bleeding from nose, mouth and head. He also had cut marks on his fingers. The police told them that he was caught for stealing.

Masrur told the thana-incharge Bipin Bihari Singh that Tabrez needed immediate medical help. He also said that the family was ready to cooperate with the police in its inquiry but Tabrez should first be taken to a hospital. Bipin Bihari Singh told him “Yehaan se bhaago. Nahi to tumhara bhi haath-pao tod ke tumko jail mein daal denge” (Run away from here or else I will break your bones and put you in jail”. He got scared and left the thana.

In the thana, Tabrez told his relatives about the incident. On their way back from Jamshedpur, Tabrez and the two boys were stopped in Dhatkidih village by a few men who asked him for his name. He said Sonu. They asked him for his actual name. When he said Tabrez Ansari, they caught him, while the other two ran away, and started beating him. He was later tied to a pole and beaten further. When he asked for water, he was given dhatura (a type of poisonous weed) to drink and dhatura leaves were stuffed in his mouth. He also told his relatives names of some persons who were beating him. One of them was Pappu Mandal.

In the thana, the relatives saw Pappu Mandal and 10-15 people from Dhatkidih. Pappu told Tabrez, “Itna maare the, tab bhi abhi tak zinda hai?” (We beat you do much and yet you are still alive?).

Next day (19 June), the relatives were informed that Tabrez was shifted to the local jail. They went there to meet him. He was brought out by two policemen who were holding him. He was still severely injured and weak. Despite multiple requests, he was not given adequate medical treatment.

On 22 June, the uncles were informed by an acquaintance that Tabrez was admitted in Saraikela Sadar hospital. They went there and found that there was foaming at the mouth. The doctor told them that Tabrez was dead. When a local reporter checked the body, she found that he was still breathing. Upon hearing this, the relatives shouted at the doctor. He then referred Tabrez to Tata Medical Hospital, Jamshedpur. When they reached the hospital, he was found to be dead.

Following his death, the family members lodged a case against Pappu Mandal and others for lynching of Tabrez.

Details of villages and victims' family

24-year old Tabrez Ansari's family lived in Kadamdiha village of Kharsawan block. The village has around 400-500 Muslim households and a few Santhal and Hindu families. Tabrez's father died 10 years back and his mother around 18-20 years back. He lived with his paternal uncles and their families. Masroor runs a kirana shop in the village and Maksood runs a car garage near the village.

Tabrez worked as a welder in Pune since the last 6-7 years. He used to visit home once in a couple of years. He had come before Eid to get married and celebrate the festival. He got married a month and a half before his death and was planning to return to Pune with his wife this month itself.

Dhatkidih has significant population of backward castes, primarily Mahto and Mandals.

Observations and testimonies of family members and residents of Kadamidiha

All the neighbours that the team spoke to said that they got to know of the incident through a video that was circulating on social media. Abdul Samat said that Kadamidiha never saw communal incidents in the past and it was always peaceful. Some villagers recalled a year-old incident when members of religious right-wing organisations had told the Muslims of the village to stop cattle trade in the nearby market. It stopped for some time. They said that it resumed again as the business is done primarily by people of other communities.

All the people of the village that the team spoke to vouched that Tabrez did not have any criminal antecedent. He was never accused of stealing in the village. He spent most of his time in Pune and had little interaction with people of the village. According to Tabrez's uncle, the accusation of theft of bike was wrong. When people of Dhaktidih realized that Tabrez was in a bad shape after the beating, they decided to create a story of bike theft. They only brought the bike from somewhere and made it look like theft. The mob forced Tabrez to say that he was a thief.

People also said that they were aware of the accusations of stealing against Tabrez and the two boys who accompanied him to Jamshedpur on 17 June. But they did not know whether Tabrez and the others actually committed some theft. The two boys did not come back to the village after the incident and did not contact the villagers. They are yet to be found.

Discussion in Dhatkidih village

The team stopped at Dhatkidih village and met a few women and men sitting by the roadside. Some of them went inside their houses when they saw the team. The women shared that they were scared and

the police had established a picket in the local school. They also said that the police was searching for the persons who beat Tabrez in Dhatkidih.

They said that they were not present at the spot where the incident happened. But they had heard that Tabrez and his two companions had tried to break into Kamal Mahto's house at around 2am in the morning of 18 June. They were caught in this process and beaten. They also said that the three men had a new motorbike with them that was stolen from another village. The team could not meet Kamal Mahto or cross check the alleged theft from the other village.

Political attempts to deepen religious polarisation

Suddenly, a group of young men came in the village on a few motorcycles and a car. They stopped at the spot where the fact-finding team members were talking to the women. They got down and started asking the women if the security forces were harassing them. Then they told the women, "Sab Jai Shri Ram hai. Ghabrane ke baat nahi hai". The women looked scared and said "humlog Jai Shri Ram aur Jai Hanuman waale hai". The men told the women that they had come to support the villagers. They were being harassed for punishing a thief. They kept telling the villagers that if a thief comes to steal, people would definitely not kiss him, but give him apt punishment. One of them also said that a thief has no religion. He is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim; so making him chant Jai Shri Ram was not wrong. They were trying to mobilise the villagers in the name of religion.

The men asked members of the fact-finding team their names and about their work, and tried to indirectly intimidate the members through their questions. They took photographs and videos with the security forces deputed in the village. Even though the team wanted to discuss more with the people of Dhatkidih, it had to leave because of the actions of the young men.

On further investigation on social media by the fact-finding team, it emerged that one of the young men (who was leading the others) is a member of the ruling party. The group held a meeting with the villagers after the fact-finding team left the village. The post on social media regarding the meeting reads – "आज सरायकेला खरसावा , जिला अन्तर्गत धतकीडीह गांव में गए थे .जहाँ एक चोर के पीटने के मामले को मॉब लीचिंग की संज्ञा देकर निर्दोष ग्रामीणों को भयभीत किया जा रहा है.जो बिलकुल निंदनीय है .आज गांव में डर के माहौल के चलते लोग पलायन कर रहे हैं . हम सब लोगों ने गांव के लोगो को विश्वास दिलाया की भाजपा परिवार आप सबों के हर सुख एवं दुःख में साथ है . पर साजिश के तहत हिन्दू एवं हिन्दुत्व को कोई बदनाम करेगा तो उसको सफल नहीं होने देंगे".

This incident clearly indicates that the ruling party is trying to deepen the religious polarization in the area.