

Statement (India) Condemning the Brutal Killing of Lakhbir Singh

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In the early hours of October 15, Lakhbir Singh, a 35-year old labourer from the Mazhabi Sikh community (Dalits who converted to Sikhism), was brutally tortured and murdered at the protest site at Singhu border near Delhi.

It has been alleged that Lakhbir Singh had attempted to steal the holy scriptures of the Sikh community. Members of the Nihang Sikh sect have come forward and taken the responsibility for the barbaric act. Not only have the leaders of the Nihang community not shown any sign of remorse for the incident they have gone on to proclaim that they defend and might repeat the same act in case there was any repeat of blasphemy in the future. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has already denounced the killing and have distanced themselves from the Nihangs. The Hindutva right has been quick to take this opportunity to claim that the farmers' protests as a whole is responsible for break down in law order and for moral degeneration more generally.

Firstly, we on the left unequivocally denounce such a brutal killing of an ordinary working class person. Even if it is proved beyond any doubt that Lakhbir Singh was guilty of blasphemy individuals cannot take the law into their own hands and carry out acts of indescribable brutality. Secondly, this clearly demonstrates that all religious organizing carries with it the potential danger of quickly collapsing into reactionary politics. This is true not just for those organizing around questions of Hindutva or political Islam, but is equally true of Christian fundamentalists, Buddhist fundamentalists, and in this case Sikh fundamentalists. The important lesson to draw is not to condemn religion and only uphold values of atheism. The important lesson is that while we respect people's right to practice and have their own faith, left organizing must always be wary of religious groups. Ours is a fight against exploitation and oppression for a better world. Organizing for this aim can and must have people from all faiths and religions, but cannot be based around religious organizing. Thirdly, it is wrong to hold the farmers' movement in general responsible for this barbaric act. The current farmers' movement is one of the longest standing movements in India, and is against arguably the most brutal and oppressive central government, independent India has ever seen. The movement in its current form has already been running for more than 14 months and has been almost entirely non-violent in character. We must defend the movement from right-wing attacks while we condemn this brutal killing and call for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

Lastly, we would like to underscore another less highlighted incident. A 26-year old woman activist from Bengal joined members of the farmers' movement who were campaigning against the BJP for the state assembly election in WB. She came with them to the Tikri border. On the way, it has been alleged, she was assaulted by members of the Kisan Social Army. It has been further alleged that later during her stay at Tikri she was raped by those who were harassing her for a while. She contracted and died of Covid during the deadly second wave. After her death, her father has filed an FIR.

Of course, the above incident has sometimes been cynically used by right-wing supporters of the BJP

and Sangh Parivar to discredit the movement in general. We need to stand firmly in support of the movement but never at the cost of brushing under the carpet incidents of oppression that may happen within such progressive spaces of mobilisation. This will not undermine the movement. What will truly undermine our strength is when women, Dalits (like Lakhbir Singh) and other members of an oppressed community are unable to join our movement without fear. Given the kind of society we live in this is not going to happen automatically. It will require us to be ever vigilant about such incidents and to never hush up any such incident for the sake of the movement. That will be a testament to our commitment to fighting injustice whenever and wherever it raises its ugly head, and will ultimately strengthen our struggles.

Radical Socialist demands that due punishment be done to the perpetrators of sexual violence at the Tikri border and urge all those involved in progressive organizing to be vigilant about such atrocities. Radical Socialist also demands that the perpetrators of the brutal murder of Lakhbir Singh be brought to justice. Two people have been arrested so far, and one of them is Dalit. Irrespective of their faith and social background, people who are found guilty of this crime should be held accountable. However, this should not be lead to any further victimization of the family members of Lakhbir Singh, and they should be duly compensated by the state.

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