

# **A cover-up that failed**

*Death and Protest at Najafgarh Police Station*

**People's Union for Democratic Rights**

**Delhi**

**April 1993**

On 3rd March 1993 many national dailies reported the death of 35 year old Satyavan, resident of village Jharoda Kalan, Najafgarh, in police custody. He was picked up from the Jharoda Kalan bus stand together with Ishwar Singh of the same village and Pilloo of Bahadurgarh town, at around 1-1.30 p.m. on 2nd March. These latter two carried Satyavan's dead body back to Jharoda Kalan the same evening. PUDR sent a fact finding team that met the family members, the villagers, the new SHO of Najafgarh police station, the SDM (Punjabi Bagh) and the DCP (South-West). Following is the report of the team.

Satyavan, a truck driver, was the sole bread winner of the family that consists of his 56-57 year old handicapped father, a wife (32 years) and five children - one of whom is again handicapped. On 2nd March Satyavan was picked along with Ishwar Singh and Pilloo from the village bus stand by the then SHO, Ramesh Chandra Nanda, the head constable, Rajender Singh and two other constables. All three were taken to Najafgarh police station where they were brutally beaten up. At around 3-3.30 p.m. Satyavan collapsed. Ishwar and Balraj were forced to take the body back to the village under threat. Else they would be booked under various false charges. Scared, they brought the corpse back to the village travelling half the way by auto-rickshaw and then in a DTC bus. On reaching the village he was taken in a tempo to a private nursing home - the Prasad Nursing Home - where he was declared brought dead.

A crowd of around 700-800 villagers gathered and blocked the road with bricks and pipes protesting against the ghastly act of the police and refused to cremate the body. They were demanding the suspension, immediate arrest and launching of prosecution against the guilty policemen on charges of murder. It was only with the intervention of the DCP (Ranjit Narayan) and the SDM (Veerender Kumar) that the body could be sent for post-mortem at around 1.30 a.m. The post-mortem was conducted at J.P. Narayan Hospital. The same night, the SHO was transferred to the Police Lines and the Head Constable suspended. Two days later the suspension orders for the SHO also came. A case under Section 304 IPC (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) was registered against the two. This case was later transferred to the Crime

Branch of Delhi Police, which is investigating this case since the day of the incident. A statutory inquiry by the SDM was also started on 3rd March. Interestingly another independent inquiry by the ADM (S.K. Malhotra) was ordered on 11th March. The latter, according to newspapers, is supposed to be a more comprehensive one in which the entire sequence of events related to the death of Satyavan and the related events would be looked into.

According to the police, the three people were picked up on the afternoon on 2 March for "verification" as they were trying to run away on seeing the police. They were released around 3.30 p.m. the same evening. The police denies any kind of torture. According to the family members and the villagers, Satyavan was earlier arrested on 23rd February along with 10-12 other persons in connection with the BJP rally. At that time Rs. 50,000 were demanded from Satyavan's family to set him free and a compromise was reached on Rs. 30,000. He was released on 25th February after a forced payment of Rs. 14,500. The rest of the amount was to be paid in the next few days. The villagers insist that he was picked up on 2nd March only to extort the remaining amount. They also complain that there had been other similar incidents of police arresting people and demanding bribe to set them free. But according to the DCP, Satyavan was earlier arrested on 25 February for his involvement in a brawl and was released the same day by the Metropolitan Magistrate after due admonition. The DCP did not rule out the possibility of money being taken from the family. We were also told by the villagers that Pilloo and others from the village are repeatedly being threatened so as to change their statements.

The police right from the beginning propagated that the victim was the drug addict who was also engaged in shady dealings. He was also a T.B. patient and had left driving a few years back because of his illness. (It should be noted that the police has been indulged in this type of propaganda in order to draw legitimacy for their act). The family and the villagers deny both. The DCP was quite apprehensive and said that the things would become clear only after the inquiry is completed.

The Panchayat of 360 Palam villages including Jharoda Kalan is actively protesting against the police. In a panchayat meeting organised on 7th March, arrest of the accused, adequate compensation for the family, and a job for the widow were demanded. A protest committee was also constituted to further pursue the matter. Incidentally the BJP also is taking a tremendous interest in the case. Madan Lal Khurana and Saheb Singh Verma of the party were present in the above mentioned panchayat meeting and the BJP city unit chief O.P. Kohli visited the village on 17th March and gave Rs. 11,000 to the bereaved family.

As the enquiries continue, we demand:

1. The SDM and ADM enquiries be made public
2. Due compensation be given to the family

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