

Press Release

Patna

4th May,2017



Subject: Mill Owner-Land Mafia-Administration-Police nexus results in self-immolation of two honest labour leaders in Champaran, the first land of Gandhi

It is ironical, and indeed painful, that exactly after 100 yrs in the land of Champaran, where Gandhi began his first struggle for emancipation of farmers and labourers, farmers and labourers are being compelled by their horrendous exploitation, this time by Indians and not the British, to immolate themselves. This is an absolute anti-climax in the centenary year.

The Hanuman Sugar Mill at Motihari, Champaran is practically closed since 2000. The 7000 sugarcane farmers were not paid their dues, nor are the 500-odd labourers being paid their wages or their PF arrears which

amounts to almost 80 crores. Several agreements took place, several court orders came, but there was no compliance by the Mill owner. In 2015, there was a tripartite agreement between Mill-owner, Labourers and the administration for payment of dues of labourers and farmers by selling the useless material lying at the Mill. But that agreement could also not be enforced. Several warrants were issued against the owner Bimal Nopani, but there was no execution of the warrants.

To press their demands, some labourers gave notice of self-immolation to local administration on March 22, 2017 setting a deadline of midnight of 9th April, if something concrete was not done to clear their arrears. Copies of the notice were sent by speed post to everybody concerned including the President of India, Prime Minister and the Chief Minister, Bihar.

In spite of the notice, no preventive action was taken by the police or administration like deploying a magistrate or police force, or a fire-tender or ambulance near the declared site of dharna at the declared time of self-immolation. The two labour leaders were entirely honest and, unlike many others, could not be 'managed' by the Mill owners or the land mafia, which has a roaring business there running into thousands of crores. This is because there are over 1000 acres of land of the Sugar Mill and Bettiah Raj, which are under cloud of some kind. Being close to the town, the price of one acre of land is in the vicinity of 10 crores of Indian rupees. Naresh Srivastava, the labour leader who first burnt himself to death, used to run to the DM whenever he found any pile of bricks near a disputed land site, and used to get the construction stopped. So the land mafia wanted him eliminated. The safest way seems to have been found by them was to influence the local police and administration to not take any preventive step, and let this man burn himself. And this is what exactly happened. What was equally sinister was to lodge cases against the fellow labourers accusing them of burning the two labour leaders to death. The police also lathi-charged and filed at the labourers and even ransacked their homes beating up even their ladies. The complicity and negligence of the local

administration is also evident from the fact that the dying declaration was not got recorded in spite of abundant time available.

On getting this news a Jan Sunwai was organised at Motihari by a team comprising Swami Agnivesh, Sr Gandhian and former MP 94-yr-old Dr. Ramji Singh, PK Siddharth, ex-IPS and National President, Bharatiya Surraaj Dal (भारतीय सुराज दल), Social Activist Manohar Manav and Prof. Shakil Ahmad Ata. The team has submitted its enquiry report after public hearing (Jan Sunwai) to the Chief Minister of Bihar, and it is being sent to the media in full via email. We are expecting the Chief Minister to give us a hearing. Some of the recommendations of the committee are as follows:

- 1) Let CBI investigate the case.
- 2) SP and DM Motihari be transferred and DSP town and OC Chatauni be suspended immediately.
- 3) Terror unleashed by Police on labourers must be stopped immediately.
- 4) Mill-owner be arrested immediately.
- 5) A Commissioner-rank officer be deputed at Motihari for two months to go into all records and find most feasible ways to sell some land or property of the Mill-Owner and clear arrears of labourers and farmers with interest immediately.

Swami Agnivesh, Dr. Ramji Singh, P.K. Siddharth, Manohar Manav, Prof. S.A. Ata