

## 9 November 2014

Three people were murdered and their mutilated body parts dispersed on a farm in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district. In what appears to be a case of caste violence, a Dalit family of three was savagely murdered and their mutilated body parts dispersed on a farm in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district, around 180 km from Pune.

According to sources, the gruesome murders of Sanjay Jadhav (42), his wife Jayashree (38) and their teenage son Sunil (19) took place after midnight on October 21 in the sparsely populated village of Javkhede Khalasa-Kasarwadi in Pathardi Taluk.

Relatives strongly suspect the incident to be a case of 'honour killing'. "Rumours of an illicit affair between a married lady in an upper-caste household, who lived adjacent to the Jadhav's farm, and a member in the Jadhav family, had been festering for more than a year. This may have led to such a savage retribution," said a relative of the family.

At the time of the crime, Mr. Jadhav, a mason by profession, was staying in his makeshift home on his acre-and-a-half farm plot with his wife and his son. Sunil, pursuing his Diploma in Dairy Science from Goregaon in Mumbai, had come over for Diwali holidays.

"We rushed to their home on Tuesday after some farm labourers informed us of their absence. We found blood spattered and household items strewn everywhere," Dilip Jadhav, his elder brother, told *The Hindu*, recounting the horrific incident.

Mr. Jadhav's relatives mounted a frantic search for the trio at the Ahmednagar district hospital, but drew a blank when they reached there.

"On returning to my brother's field, we decided to search the well. We found some body parts floating in the water," says Suresh Jadhav, another of Mr. Jadhav's brothers.

An ominous silence has descended on the village and the Dalit hamlet of Jadhavwadi in the aftermath of the triple murder, with tight police security in place for the funeral. The Pathardi police said they had dispatched teams to several places to locate the murderers.

The homicide has traumatised Mr. Jadhav's aged parents, Jagannath (75) and Sakharbai (70), who haven't spoken a word since the crime.

The incident has drawn sharp condemnations from the Dalit community. "There were no previous incidents of caste tension in Pathardi earlier. The sheer ferocity of the murders has profoundly disturbed the sentiments of the community," said Sunil Salve, a local Dalit activist.

"Sunil's torso was found only on Wednesday evening, before which the family's last rites could not be conducted. The murders simply beggar description," said a stunned Anandraj Ambedkar, chief of the Republican Sena. Alleging that the police and district administration was corrupt, Mr. Ambedkar said that the Ahmednagar police did not do act when a Dalit youth was beaten to death earlier this year.

When contacted, Ahmednagar Superintendent of Police Lakhmi Gautam said no arrests had been made so far. "We have not picked anybody as yet. Various angles are being explored," he told *The Hindu*, refusing to comment on the possible motives of the killers.

Ahmednagar has been a hotbed of atrocities against Dalits in the recent past, with a similarly gory precedent found in the January 2013 Sonai murder case. There, the mutilated bodies of three Dalit youths, who worked as sweepers, were found in a septic tank in Sonai village, hacked to death.

Dalit leader and president of the Republican Party of India (A) Ramdas Athawale, while demanding a CID probe into the incident, has urged that Ahmednagar be declared as an 'atrocities-prone area'.