



Political parties give honour killings & caste conflicts the back seat: Activists

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THOOTHUKUDI: A day before Tamil Nadu is set to go to polls, human rights activists have decried the back seat that issues like honour killings, custodial torture, kandhuvatti menace, and caste conflicts have taken during political hustings. Speaking to TNIE, People's Water Director Henri Tiphagne and A Kathir, director of Evidence, said that neither the DMK, Congress, VCK, their mother alliance INDIA bloc, nor the BJP, or AIADMK and Puthiya Tamilagam have bothered to address the uptick in violence in the southern districts.

According to Evidence, over 28 cases of honour killing occurred in Tamil Nadu between 2022 and 2024. Over 350 people belonging to the scheduled caste (SC) community were murdered during the 2017-22 period. "Not only against SCs, honour killing is prevalent within backward communities as well as same castes," said Kathir, and criticised political parties for excluding social issues from the ambit of development and welfare.

Amid election campaigns, three custodial deaths were recorded in Madurai, Villupuram, and Chennai prisons, between April 5 and 16, said Tiphagne. Activists led by Kathir, under the banner Dalit Human Rights' Defenders' Network, met as many as 45 MPs to enact a draft bill on 'Freedom of Marriage and Association, and Prohibition of Crimes in the name of Honour, 2022' in the parliament. But, there was no response, he said.

A bill seeking strict action against honour killing was discussed in the parliament in 2010, when Veerapa Moily was the law minister, but there has been no progress since, he added.

Tiphagne also said that political parties, including the opposition, have failed to seek fasttracking of punishment against police officials who

gunned down 13 anti-Sterlite protesters. Advocate Ayyalusamy of Kovilpatti said that Kandhuvatti menace has plagued the middle class and downtrodden in Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli. But, he added, the police refuse to register a case against money lenders. "The demand seeking amendment to the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Charging Exorbitant Interest Act also has not seen much progress," Ayyalyusamy said.

"The BJP, which is also the opposition in Tamil Nadu, had allied with the Tamilaga Makkal Munnetra Kalagam led by John Pandian and AMMK, which are inclined towards the dominant castes," said a political analyst.

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