

Chennai custodial death: Post-mortem report reveals 13 wounds on victim's body

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A 25-year-old Dalit man who allegedly died in police custody in Chennai last month had 13 different wounds on his body, reveals post-mortem report.

- News The police had claimed that Vignesh had suffered a fatal seizure on April 19
- His family said he had no such medical history and alleged he was tortured by police
- Vignesh was brutally hit from 11 pm to 2:30 am: Executive Director of People's Watch

The post-mortem report of a 25-year-old Dalit man who allegedly died in police custody in Chennai last month had 13 different wounds on his body including 12 contusions and an abrasion. The report has sparked a controversy as the police had earlier claimed that the victim identified as Vignesh had died due to a seizure.

The victim, Vignesh and his brother Suresh, were travelling in an auto and were stopped by police on April 18 when they were arrested by Chennai police for allegedly possessing marijuana and a knife. The following day on April 19 Vignesh died and the police claimed that he suffered a fatal seizure.

However, Vignesh's family said he had no such medical history and alleged he was tortured by the police.

The police had registered a case of "suspicious death" and a police sub-inspector, a constable and a home guard personnel were suspended in connection with the incident. The case was transferred to the Crime Branch CID police for further investigation.

The autopsy report further revealed contusions in several parts of Vignesh's body, including his head, above the eyes, cheek and hands. However, the exact cause of death is yet to be established as more reports are awaited.

Addressing the media, the brother of the deceased, Vinoth narrated the incidents that happened after his brother Vignesh's arrest. "My aunt and I were called by the police on the next day, that is 19th of April, at around 6 pm and they said that my brother had died due to a seizure earlier. They said he vomited a few times in the presence of police officials like DC and a few inspectors. I refused to believe it and said he had no medical history. Later I was given two bundles of Rs 50,000 each from police personnel for the last rituals of my brother. Only I was allowed to see the mortal remains of my brother. I was asked to burn the mortal remains of my brother by one of the police officers, but I refused," Vinoth said.

He insisted on conducting the final rites according to their custom and burying the mortal remains. Vinoth said that he also threatened to self-immolate in front of the police headquarters if they didn't allow him to do so. "I ran to the Magistrate who was there. I asked him to allow me to bury the mortal remains of my brother. He in turn granted me permission and several police personnel were deployed on the burial grounds to ensure that there are no issues in the burial," he added.

Demanding stringent punishment for his brother's death, Vinoth said, "If at all there is wrongdoing on the part of police why did they deploy so many cops at the burial ground? I later went to the High court, and demanded justice for my brother. I need all the cops who were involved in my brother's murder to be dismissed and not suspended, only then I would feel that justice has been done for my brother. No such incidents should happen in the future. The cops should be punished in a way that no one would engage in such brutality hereafter."

On April 22, three days after the death of Vignesh, three cops including a Sub-Inspector, a police constable and a Home guard policeman were placed under suspension for allegedly bribing the family of the deceased Vignesh to hide the custodial death.

The Joint Action Committee of Advocates, a union of advocates group based out of Tamil Nadu that mostly appears in cases related to human rights violations, has claimed Vignesh's death was caused by the brutality of the police.

Peoples Watch, a human rights NGO, and its State Co-coordinator Henri Tiphagne said, "The post mortem report of Vignesh says he suffered from 13 external injuries on different parts of the body, including head, cheeks and eyebrows, hands and legs. What else does the DGP of Tamil Nadu need apart from this?"

Talking to News9, Executive Director of People's Watch Henri Tiphagne, who has been closely tracking the case, said "Vignesh was brutally hit from 11 pm on April 18 to 2:30 am on April 19. Two teams of police assaulted him in the presence of an auto driver Suresh (eyewitness). Thereafter, he was taken to K2 Ayanavaram police station and continued to be tortured and beaten. Later in the morning, Vignesh was moved to the Secretariat Colony police station where he fell ill badly and was taken to the private hospital from there. He had already succumbed by the time he was transferred from a private hospital to KMC."

Henri added that the family was not informed of the arrest. "This is also a violation of the law. And even though the case has been transferred to CB-CID, it is not registered under Section 302 (Punishment for murder). CCTV cameras should be there in the police station, which is again another violation. The way forward to end the brutality is zero tolerance to custodial deaths and police brutality."

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