



Custodial torture: Family claims two minors among victims

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In the custodial torture case against suspended IPS Balveer Singh, one of the affected families alleged that two minor boys were also allegedly tortured in custody on March 10 inside the Ambasamudram police station in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district.

"I could hear my son crying inside the police station," said Rajeshwari at a press conference in Chennai on Wednesday accompanied by her elder son, Arun Kumar, 22 and younger son, 17. Arun Kumar showed five of his broken teeth at the press conference while his younger brother's identity was protected. The 17-year-old was taken into custody along with his friends of age 16 and 28 along with Kumar inside the Ambasamudram police station on March 10.

According to victims who spoke to HT earlier, the issue started as a small dispute between two groups. E Esaikumuthu, one of the victims explained to HT on March 28 that it was an issue of an intercaste love interest between his family who belong to the Nadar community, the prevalent community in Tirunelveli and the other group who belong to the Scheduled Castes. Arun Kumar on Wednesday said that a person Subhash from Esakimuthu's family attacked his friend Mahendran on March 10. Arun's younger brother and his friends had come in search of him. This is when the police rounded them all up and one group was Rajeshwari's sons and friends totalling four. In the other group there were six including Esakimuthu, his brothers Chellappa and Mariappan. All nine of them were taken to the Ambasamudram police station on March 10th.

Both groups say that assistant superintendent of police (ASP) Balveer Singh kept shouting "gang war" repeatedly at them without letting them speak. Esakimuthu's younger brother Chellappa was called first inside a room in the police station and they could hear him scream. After the case came to light, more than a dozen men have complained that Singh pulled out their teeth and Esakimuthu and Mariappan have said that the police officer crushed their testicles which led to his suspension and an investigation against him.

Kumar reiterated that Singh changed from his uniform to track pants, a white vest and white gloves. Police in the station held everyone's hands and legs while Singh used stones to break their teeth. "ASP would come to each of us, ask "who is doing rowdyism" and break our teeth," Kumar said. "ASP broke five people's teeth from their side and two from our side. He made us clean so much blood. Then he changed back to his uniform. With a lathi he beat me all over my body. He hit both my palms and heels 20 times each, on my head, shoulders and below my knee."

By this time, Rajeshwari was sent away from the Ambasamudram police station. Later, her sons and friends were shifted to V K Puram police station, she said. "Around 3pm

I saw my sons in the V K Puram police station. My older son's three teeth were broken into pieces," the mother said, adding that she saw another person for whom four teeth were broken. "My son was shirtless and his pants were full of blood. He was crying a lot. He was sprawled on the floor. My younger son was made to stand in his underwear. He cried asking me to take him away because he was in pain. He said that the police hit him a lot," Rajeshwari said. Her 17-year-old son is a college student in neighbouring Thoothukudi district. His two friends had swollen lips and a broken finger, she added.

She said that police told her that they were bleeding because they fell down and sent her to bring back change of clothes for both her sons and their two friends. She was also asked to arrange two cars to take them from the police station to the hospital and the magistrate. Rajeshwari showed a receipt from Selvam Cabs which she had booked and also a Google pay of ₹2500 made to one of the police personnel for their food.

Around 6.30pm Kumar said that ASP Balveer came to the V R Puram police station. "He took a stone again and said if anyone does rowdyism I'll break your leg. He also told us not to say that we were hit," Kumar said. Once the police knew they had custody of two minors, they produced them in front of the Juvenile Justice Board to be sent to an observation home. "We were there for eight days," the minor said adding that they were instructed not to say that they were beaten.

Madurai-based human rights NGO, People's Watch aided the family's press meet in Chennai. Advocate and executive director of the NGO, Henri Tiphange said that the case shows that the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 has been violated. "One such is that uniformed police cannot be with juveniles," Tiphange said. "There has been no principle of innocence applied. What mistake did he make? He went in search of his brother. If an enquiry was conducted, police would have known." The wrongdoers must also be booked under the SC/ST prevention of atrocities act, he said.

More cops face action

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu's police department has ordered for six personnel in Tirunelveli to be placed on Vacancy Reserve which means the police have to report to the headquarters without any posting. This action has been taken against– S Chandramohan (inspector, Ambasamudram police station), B Rajakumari (inspector, Kallidaikurichi Circle) A Perumal (inspector, V K Puram Circle), N Sakthi Natarajan (sub-inspector, Ambasamudram sub-division), M Santhanakumar (special branch staff, Ambasamudram police station) and V Manikandan (additional special branch staff, Ambasamudram).

Previously, on Monday, the superintendent of police (SP) in Tirunelveli, P Saravanan was put on compulsory wait in connection with the case. Tamil Nadu's home department announced the order with immediate effect and for Thoothukudi SP L Balaji to hold full charge until further orders. Earlier, on Sunday two constables (Bogan and Rajkumar) were transferred to the armed reserve amidst victims saying that police are pressuring them to turn hostile.

On Wednesday night, the home department made N Silambarasan the new Superintendent of Police of Tirunelveli District. Silambarasan currently the Deputy Commissioner of Police, South, Coimbatore City.

Singh, a batch 2020 officer, was in his first posting as Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) in Ambasamudram in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district. While the sub-divisional magistrate Cheranmahadevi and the State Human Rights Commission is conducting an enquiry on the complaints, chief minister M K Stalin announced in the assembly last week that he has ordered for Singh's suspension.

Even as the DMK led government is being criticised for not filing an FIR against Singh, the IPS Officers' Association Tamil Nadu Chapter (TNIPSA) on Tuesday called for a stop of the "media trial" in the case. People's Watch condemned TNIPSA's statement. They posed seven questions to TNIPSA's president Abhash Kumar including if the association has verified CCTV footage from the police stations where the alleged custodial torture has been reported. "Clean your house—Mr Abhash Kumar IPS -- before issuing this kind of statement," said People's Watch. "Media exposition and public pressure alone have led to the few follow-ups that we are witnessing today — whether it is the suspension of Balveer Singh IPS and putting him on a compulsory waitlist; placing SP Saravanan again on a compulsory wait list..."

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/suspended-ips-officer-accused-of-custodial-torture-of-minors-in-tamil-nadu-police-station-101680722557987.html>