

Ground report: For Jayaraj and Beniks' kin, the wait for justice is the punishment. Five years since the horrific Sathankulam custodial torture case, victims' family still awaits justice. In connection with the case, 10 police personnel — including Inspector Sridhar and Sub-Inspectors Ragu Ganesh and Balakrishnan — were arrested and are currently lodged in Madurai Central Prison.

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Jayaraj's daughter J Persis — Beniks's sister.

Synopsis: *J Beniks and his father died in June 2020 following alleged custodial torture. Even after five years, the case is still being heard, with no sign of a verdict. The victims' family and friends remain in distress, caught in an endless wait for justice.*

Exactly five years ago, on the night of 22 June 2020, news broke out that J Beniks had died in custody after being brutally assaulted by the personnel at the Sathankulam Police Station in the Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu. By the next morning, his father, Jayaraj, also succumbed to similar injuries in custody.

It all began on 19 June that year, when Sathankulam police summoned Jayaraj under the pretext of an inquiry and assaulted him. When his son Beniks went to the police station to question them, he was also taken into custody and allegedly tortured throughout the night. The father-son duo eventually passed due to multiple internal injuries.

In connection with the case, 10 police personnel — including Inspector Sridhar and Sub-Inspectors Ragu Ganesh and Balakrishnan — were arrested and are currently lodged in Madurai Central Prison. One of the accused, Special Sub-Inspector Pauldurai, died of Covid-19, and the remaining nine continue to stay in custody as under-trial prisoners. These arrests were made possible following an inquiry led by Judge Barathidasan of the Kovilpatti Criminal Sessions Court and the courageous testimony of Sathankulam Head Constable Revathi.

Initially investigated by the Crime Branch-Criminal Investigation Department (CB-CID), the case was later transferred to the CBI. Over 100 witness statements were consolidated into 53, and the case is currently being heard by the 1st Additional District Judge (ADJ) at the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court.

Even after five years, the case has yet to reach a verdict. In light of this, **South First** travelled to Thoothukudi to meet the family of Jayaraj and Beniks and understand how they are coping

A family in ruins



Members of the Jeyaraj-Beniks family.

Jayaraj and Selvarani had three daughters and a son. After the deaths, the entire family was forced to leave Sathankulam and relocate to another district. **South First** visited the home of J Persis, Beniks’s sister, who remains visibly shaken and emotionally affected by the tragedy

Speaking in a trembling voice, Persis said, “It’s been five years since my father and brother were beaten to death inside a police station. Despite overwhelming evidence and eyewitness testimonies, we haven’t got justice. Since November 2024, the court has been functioning without a full-time judge.”

She added, “Every time we go to court, the accused walk in freely without even a slight remorse. They eat, laugh, and roam around the court premises with their families like nothing happened. They even smirk at us. However, we, the victims, are still struggling in pain.”

Selvarani, Jayaraj’s wife and Beniks’s mother, is in deep psychological distress, and could barely speak.

“They took my husband and son to the station and killed them. We still haven’t received justice. We came from a humble background and lived peacefully. Our children were obedient and never got into trouble. Now, each court visit breaks our hearts. After God, we place our trust only in the judiciary. I beg the authorities to appoint a judge and give us justice immediately,” she said with teary eyes.

Witnesses speak out

Beniks’s friends were key witnesses, as they were present outside the police station on the night of 19 June 2020.

M Sankaralingam, one of the key witnesses, told **South First**, “It’s been four years since I testified in court. The case still hasn’t concluded. At first, many people rallied behind us and gave us hope that justice would come quickly. However, even after five years, we’re still fighting. Judges have come and gone. We don’t even know where the case is headed. On each passing anniversary, it feels like a disaster. I hope things will be different next year.”

Another friend, R Muthusamy, said, “Beniks was like a brother to me. He and his father were quiet, peaceful people. We are still unable to come to terms with their brutal murders. People are given sentences even for petty crimes. However, in this gruesome case, no punishment has been pronounced yet. Only a life sentence or the death penalty will restore our faith in justice.”

Why the delay?



Advocate Rajiv Rufus.

From local politicians to international figures, many had raised their voices for Jayaraj and Beniks. The DMK, then in Opposition, even promised to personally pursue the case. However, now, despite being in power, there has been no conviction. The family’s lawyer, V Rajiv Rufus, pointed to the lack of a permanent judge in the 1st ADJ Court in Madurai over the past several months as a key reason for the delay. “All nine accused have their own lawyers. As a result, every witness is subjected to repeated cross-examination by nine different lawyers, dragging out the proceedings. It takes three to four months to fully examine each witness. Inspector Sridhar, who is defending himself without a lawyer, prolongs the trial by asking repetitive and irrelevant questions,” Rufus told **South First**.

‘DMK government betrayed us’

Meanwhile, human rights activist and lawyer, People’s Watch Executive Director Henri Tiphagne, strongly criticised the state government.

Speaking to **South First**, Tiphagne said, “We are angry with this government. The DMK has cheated us. They promised action after the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 Assembly elections, but failed to follow through. Whether it’s the Sterlite case or the Sathankulam case, justice is still elusive. Who is responsible for this delay?”



Human rights activist Henri Tiphagne.

“Not a single full-day hearing has been held in this case. Four judges have already been changed. Now there isn’t even a permanent judge. Is this not the government’s failure?”

The Law Minister frequently meets senior judicial officials — why hasn't he addressed this?" Tiphagne questioned.

"A government that calls itself socially just and people-centric should not remain silent on this. If they truly care, the chief minister must act. The DMK must answer this delay," he added.

'A verdict within three months?'

Rufus told **South First** that a directive has been issued to conclude the case within three months.

However, such deadlines were issued multiple times in the past. In 2020, Selvarani had petitioned the court to complete the trial within six months. Several such orders have come and gone over the last five years, yet the case remains pending.

"If a permanent judge is appointed and daily hearings are conducted, the case could be completed within three months," Rufus emphasised.

Tiphagne echoed this sentiment: "We can set a precedent only by appointing a permanent judge or at least constituting a special bench exclusively for this case. That is the only way by which justice will be served."

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