



TNM investigation: Sathankulam cops have a history of custodial violence

TNM speaks to multiple victims and activists who have witnessed brutal acts by sub inspectors Balakrishnan and Raghuganesh.



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In March 2013, Vaiyapuri, a resident of Thirukkurugudi in Tirunelveli district, was riding his bike on a bridge when three police officers stopped his vehicle. The young man was asked to produce documents for his bike and when he presented photocopies, the police officers allegedly threw them to the floor and demanded to know how much money he had.

In his petition to the Madras High Court, Vaiyapuri had stated that when he told the police personnel that he had only Rs 150, he was abused and asked why he needed a bike when he barely had cash. They then allegedly took him to the station, stripped him naked and thrashed him. He sustained serious injuries on his thigh in the assault. Later, his thumb impression was taken on a blank paper.



News article in a Tamil daily from 2013 detailing harassment endured by Vaiyapuri

TNM spoke to activists and other victims of the duo, only to find a trail of brutal attacks by the sub inspectors, who have repeatedly gotten away with their violent behaviour.

“In Vaiyapuri’s case, Balakrishnan came and apologised and said that his whole life would be ruined if he was convicted for the brutality,” says Pon Karthikeyan, who was Vaiyapuri’s advocate. The victim had approached the court for a compensation of Rs 1 lakh and asked that the offending police officials be punished.

“My client and Balakrishnan then agreed for an out of court settlement. But it seems that the sub inspector never actually changed at all. As a lawyer, I feel terrible that we couldn’t stop him seven years ago,” adds the advocate.

Balakrishnan was reportedly transferred multiple times following this incident over various allegations of abuse until he came to the Sathankulam station in 2019, where he and Sub Inspector Raghuganesh allegedly terrorised residents together.

34-year-old Lazares, a pastor from Palaniappuram near Sathankulam, was a victim of their horrific violence on February 21 this year along with his wife when police picked them base



Even a man with disabilities, Ayyadurai, who was with the pastor, was mercilessly beaten, says Lazares.

“Finally villagers and Christian groups had to intervene before they let us out,” he adds. “While Raghuganesh led the assault, Balakrishanan abused us verbally,” he alleges.

The National Christian Council then provided legal support to the pastor and information was sent to the State Human Right Commission and the Minorities Commission. They also informed the Deputy Inspector General of Police.

“The Minorities commission sent a notice to the Collector and the DIG. The DSP then called us for an inquiry,” says National Christian Council state coordinator CS Jebasing. “But instead of taking action, the police officials told us that the SI will apologise and that we should withdraw the complaint,” he adds.

The victims, however, refused and demanded that the policemen who attacked them be transferred.



Pastor Lazares who was allegedly assaulted by sub inspector Raghu Ganesh

“Things didn’t move after this inquiry because of the pandemic,” says Jebasing. “But if they had listened to us then, two lives could have been saved now,” he adds.

Even these complaints, however, did nothing to hamper the violent actions of the two policemen.

Human Right activist [Henri Tiphagne](#) tells [TNM](#) that on [May 25](#), a 29-year-old construction worker named Mahendran had been picked up by _____ after being accused in the m_____



“The family was too afraid to open up about this earlier. But now seeing how activists are bringing it up and how other villagers are supporting them, they have spoken to the magistrate about the assault on Mahendran,” says Henri.

And while Mahendran succumbed to his injuries, Raja Singh, another accused in the Jayakumar murder case, has also showed signs of severe assault.

The Madurai bench in an order dated June 26 noted that it had received a report from the Principal district judge of Thoothukudi informing them that Raja Singh who was imprisoned at the Kovilpatti sub-jail had suffered serious injuries.

“Raja Singh is crucial to our case because he was in the same jail as Jayaraj and Bennix,” says advocate Vishnuvardhan, who is representing Jayaraj’s wife Selva Rani’s plea regarding the post mortem of the two deceased. “Tomorrow if something happens to Raja Singh, who is also from Sathankulam, this will become an even more serious issue. So the court has directed the Chief Judicial Magistrate of the district to conduct an enquiry into the matter and submit a report,” he adds.

According to Lazares, everyone in the villages adjoining the police station were aware of the ‘sadistic’ attitude of the policemen in Sathankulam.

When TNM contacted Thoothukudi Superintendent of Police Arun Balagopalan, he confirmed that the previous complaints against the two sub inspectors were recorded and that enquiries are underway in the matter.

Trigger warning - Image of Pastor Lazares' injuries allegedly due to police brutality



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