

Four TN Dalit men die within two months following alleged police torture

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In a worrying trend reflecting the deteriorating law and order situation in Tamil Nadu, four Dalit men have died within a span of two months allegedly due to police violence. Two of the deaths were suicides that activists say occurred after the victims were subjected to custodial torture.

The most recent case in this series is the death of 26-year-old Akash Delison from Sivaganga district, who died after allegedly being brutalised in police custody. His parents have since refused to receive his body and have been protesting, demanding action against the police personnel involved.

Human rights activists argue that the deaths of these men, all belonging to the Scheduled Caste community, point to a disturbing pattern rather than isolated incidents. They say caste prejudice within the policing system continues to make Dalits vulnerable to custodial violence.

The deaths were reported from Thanjavur, Chengalpattu, Ariyalur and Sivaganga districts between January and March 2026, prompting outrage against Chief Minister MK Stalin. It must be noted that Stalin also holds the Home Minister portfolio, responsible for the law and order in the state.

Thanjavur suicide case

Vijayakumar (31), a resident of Aaduthurai in Thanjavur district, died by suicide on February 4. He was summoned by the Kapisthalam police station on January 14 for questioning in connection with a theft case.

According to activists, Vijayakumar was allegedly beaten and subjected to custodial torture during the inquiry. He was later admitted to Thanjavur Government Hospital for treatment and subsequently returned home. Vijayakumar later died by suicide at his residence.

Chengalpattu case

Similar to Vijayakumar, Punithan, also known as Kevilan (31), from Kadapperi near Tambaram in Chengalpattu district, was detained by the Sankar Nagar police for inquiry on February 13 in connection with a case registered against him four years earlier.

Police personnel, reportedly not in uniform, took him from his house around 7 am. He was initially taken to Chromepet Government Hospital where a medical fitness certificate was obtained.

When police attempted to lodge him in Puzhal prison, prison authorities allegedly refused to admit him after observing his physical condition. He was then admitted to Stanley Government Hospital for treatment. Around 1.30 am on February 15, he was again taken to prison.

Punithan's condition worsened later and he was readmitted to Stanley Government Hospital. He died there on February 19.

Ariyalur suicide case

Selvakumar (32), from Colony Street in Jayankondam taluk of Ariyalur district, was allegedly standing outside a liquor shop on February 27 when police from the T Palur police station took his mobile phone and asked him to come to the station.

At the police station, Selvakumar was allegedly beaten and forced to sign a statement admitting that he had been drinking in public.

After returning home, Selvakumar died by suicide.

Sivaganga Engineering student death

In the latest incident, Akash Delison, a Dalit engineering graduate from Sivaganga district, died in police custody in the early hours of March 8.

Akash had been picked up by the Manamadurai police on March 6 along with an acquaintance, Guna, following allegations that the duo had attacked and injured two men using sharp weapons.

A First Information Report (FIR) was registered the same day under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including charges related to grievous hurt, attempt to murder and criminal intimidation.

Akash was remanded to judicial custody until March 18. During police custody, he suffered a broken leg. Police claimed the injury occurred while he was trying to evade arrest.

However, Akash's family told the media that when they met him on March 7, he described being assaulted by the police. His father alleged that a heavy stone had been placed above and below Akash's leg, causing it to break.

Police later rushed him to Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai for treatment. He died there on March 8.

Following his death, Akash's family refused to receive the body and staged a protest on the Madurai–Rameswaram highway near the Manamadurai bus stand, demanding strict action against the police personnel involved. The probe into the death has since been transferred to the CB-CID.

'Caste mentality behind custodial violence'

Human rights activist Aseervatham, associated with the NGO People's Watch, said violence against Dalits continues in different forms, including custodial torture.

"Violence against Dalits has not declined, whether it is custodial deaths or caste discrimination. Caste discrimination is carried out by society, while custodial deaths are carried out by the government's police," he said.

According to him, the police personnel involved in such violence are often non-Dalits who approach Dalits with a caste-based mindset.

"Their mentality reflects in these custodial deaths. Calling someone for 'inquiry' itself is illegal. The DK Basu judgment clearly states that police personnel should not come in mufti and must carry proper identification," Aseervatham

said.

Referring to the case of Punithan, he alleged that police had taken him for inquiry in his own car, an act that had earlier drawn criticism in the custodial death case of Jeyaraj and Bennix in 2020.

He also pointed to the Ariyalur case, claiming that the victim's body had not been handed over to his family. He added that the recent deaths highlight the need for stricter enforcement of laws and greater accountability within the police system.

'Culture of custodial deaths continued in DMK regime'

According to Human rights activist Henri Tiphagne, executive director of People's Watch, a total of 27 custodial deaths have been reported under the DMK government.

"I cannot and do not want to hold a government solely responsible for custodial deaths. However, the culture of custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu has continued under the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government. What started in 2021 has continued until 2026 with a tally of 27 different persons who have died in police custody," he said.

In July, TNM had reported that Tamil Nadu recorded 27 deaths in police custody over the past five years. While there is no updated official count, concerns over custodial violence and deaths continue to persist in the state.



[A look at 27 custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu: Most victims were poor and marginalised](#)

