



Sathankulam killing an example of brute force by a civilian police; calls for outright condemnation, accountability to the people, and systemic reform

The death of Jayaraj (59) and his son Fenix (31) in Sathankulam, Tuticorin district, Tamil Nadu as a result of police brutality is worrisome that police brutality in India especially against religious and ethnic minorities, children, women and the marginalized is increasing day by day and it also speaks poorly about the bias towards these communities. This incident shows that there is a dreadful familiarity among the police in treating accused offenders inhumanely. The death of the father- son duo exposes the unfortunate criminal tendencies and xenophobic attitudes present in society and its institutions.

It is evident that both the father and son died as a result of the physical torture inflicted on them at the police station. Witnesses have made public statements revealing that the father-son duo left the police station in a disheveled state, with torn and bloodied clothes. It has also come to notice that they complained to their friends about rectal bleeding and severe rectum pain. It is further disturbing to see that the doctors who examined them and the magistrate before whom they were produced did not call this out. These highlight a systemic failure in which the checks and balances have been thrown to the wind ultimately resulting in the denial of justice.

The report of the National Crime Records Bureau of Ministry of Home Affairs of the Indian Government published in 2017 shows a steep hike in the number of civilian casualties resulting from police action from 2014 to 2017. While 2014 recorded the killing of 41 civilians and the injuring of 104 civilians, in 2017 786 were killed and 3990 injured. It is also shocking that the number of civilians killed in 2017 is around six times the number in 2016, while the number of injured is nearly four times more. These statistics from Government sources dangerously point towards the growing tendencies amidst the civilian police force for use of brute force and violence against the common people.

The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) expresses deep concern over the rising cases of using brute force by civilian police. Many incidents have been reported in the recent past from Noida, Mumbai, Bijapur, Patna, Eastern Assam, and Ghaziabad and also in different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Another death of an auto rickshaw driver due to torture by police is reported from Tamilnadu on June 28th 2020.

The NCCI condemns all such acts of violence and urges governments to be vigilant in governance of policing and take immediate action against members of the police force with such delinquent records all over India, especially in the context of the gruesome records of brutality and custodial deaths, which we believe is also mixed with caste and communal prejudices.

The NCCI demands that justice be served to the families of the deceased Jayaraj and Fenix, and those who have met such fate, by taking stringent action against the accused police officers through a fair trial that will expose the offenders and do justice to the victims.

The NCCI calls for reforms to further professionalize the civilian police force and reorient its civilian base and its accountability to people.

The NCCI pays respectful homage to the memory of the unfortunate victims of the Sathankulam incident and such violence everywhere, and pledges its prayers and support to the members of the bereaved families.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary
29th June 2020