

Four tribal women file rape complaint to Tamil Nadu DGP against employer

Jun 24, 2023 04:58 PM IST

The four women in their individual complaints have said that the employer had hurled casteist slurs against the tribal men and women and beat them often and did not pay wages on time

Chennai: Four women from the Irula tribal community hailing from various parts of the state have filed a complaint with the office of the Tamil Nadu Director General of Police (DGP) Sylendra Babu that they were raped by an employer while being bonded labourers of a woodcutting unit in Chengalpattu district. Human rights activists say that they have identified as many as 20 such tribal women who have complained about sexual violence here. The alleged crime has come to light after their rescue by local officials on May 28.

The four women in their individual complaints to the DGP office—which HT has seen have said that the employer had hurled casteist slurs against the tribal men and women and beat them often and did not pay wages on time. In addition the women were subject to sexual assault, rape and humiliation, they said. “An FIR was registered in the Kelambakkam police station on June 6, but no action has been taken so we approached the DGP because there are several more victims in this case,” said I Asirwadham, state coordinator of the human rights organisation, People’s Watch.

Charges in the FIR did not mention rape but the sole accused was charged under sections of the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe Prevention of Atrocities Act, the human rights activist added. The Irula tribal community mostly hail from five districts in Tamil Nadu who are traditionally snake catchers and they also work as labourers in agricultural fields.

One of the complainants from Ranipet, whose name is being withheld by HT, said that she and her husband have been working as wood cutters for three years. “Whenever my husband went out to load the wood on to a truck, he (employer) has sexually assaulted me and raped me while I stayed alone in a hut,” she said. “When my children stayed with me, he has forcefully dragged me outside and raped me. Since we have no education and knowledge, we are afraid of him and we lived like slaves.” In her complaint to the DGP, the woman has sought action against her employer in Ranipet and protection for her family.

A second complainant, a 22-year-old woman says she tried to escape at least four times with her husband and five children. “But, no matter where he hid, his staff found us through, beat us and took us back.” From Tambaram, just outside of Chennai, this family also moved to Padur in Kancheepuram with no other job. “We live in fear that he will continue looking for us and kidnap us back,” she said in her complaint.

A 19-year-old tribal woman, the third complainant, said she has studied up to class 10 but she had to take up the job since her parents were working with him and they couldn't repay their debt. "He threatened to stab me so I was scared and didn't speak up about the sexual assault. "We were rescued by the local officials but since no action has been taken against the accused, we are wandering in different places afraid that he may find us and take us back again."

Another 22-year-old hailing from Thiruvallur district who is the fourth complainant said that the employer paid her and her husband ₹10,000 in advance in 2019 but paid the couple only ₹300 together for a week. "We have been unable to pay back the money and he (employer) has repeatedly inflicted sexual violence on me," she said. "We would be exhausted after work and he would come to the hut even at 2 am and force me to have sex with him. The last four years, we have been living sleeplessly and fearfully."

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/irula-tribal-women-file-rape-complaint-against-employer-in-chennai-woodcutting-unit-101687606091019.html>