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Ambasamudram custodial torture: The inside story on how IPS officer Balveer Singh is being protected

Filming reporters asking questions, IPS association letter demanding 'discretion', delayed action against erring officers narrate a tale.



Under fire for delayed action in the Ambasamudram custodial torture case, Tamil Nadu police, in its latest action, has moved six police personnel, including inspectors, to range vacancy reserve — in other words, shunted them out from existing postings at Ambasamudram, Kallidaikurichi and VK Puram.

The move comes after Tirunelveli Superintendent of Police (SP) P Saravanan was transferred and kept in compulsory waiting.

Even as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, following the suspension of Ambasamudram ASP Balveer Singh, an IPS officer, claimed that his government would not tolerate any kind of custodial torture, senior police personnel themselves speak of a concerted effort to protect the ASP accused of just that.

The Tamil Nadu IPS officers' Association asking the media to “exercise discretion” while publishing any [news about the suspended ASP](#) Balveer Singh has only added to what is being described as a continuing effort to protect the accused officer.

Efforts made to ‘cover’ journalists

Speaking to **South First**, a senior police officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that though there was an Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO)-level enquiry under the Police Standing Order (PSO) by the Cheranmahadevi Sub-Collector Mohammed Shabbir Alam — incidentally, a batchmate of Balveer Singh — a few [police officers in the district had made personal efforts to cover up the issue.](#)

“Station-level officers contacted local journalists and tried to convince them not to blow up the issue. They also tried to bribe them, without basic understanding that the issue had already hit the headlines and was a talking point across the state,” he said.

A prominent news channel reporter confirmed this. “Yes. A police officer with whom I have a good rapport talked to me and asked me to underplay the issue, justifying the action of the ASP,” the reporter told **South First**.

“The next day I learnt that few other officers had also spoken to certain reporters on the same lines, where they turned down their request,” the reporter added.

Propaganda in favour of suspended ASP

Meanwhile, there were posts on social media hailing the work of the suspended IPS officer, as well as posters cropping up offline.

The inspector-level officers and a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), who were named by the victims of custodial torture, had convinced the top-level officers of the district to create a “positive image” of the suspended ASP.

“These officers set up a team to take up ‘positive’ propaganda, by adding a few journalists to their team,” a police officer attached to the intelligence unit of Tirunelveli district told **South First**.

He further said: “From the next day, there were flex banners erected in the villages falling under Ambasamudram sub-division praising the ASP and pleading with the government to post him in the same area.”

One such banner, erected in Odakarai Thulukkappatti village, claimed to have been put up “on behalf of the people”.



The caption with Balveer Singh’s photo read thus: “*People’s Judgement is God’s Judgement... A request to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister: Reinstate ASP Balveer Singh and ensure the safety of the public.*”

Similar posters were seen in various places in the sub-division.

Another poster read: “*We are waiting for you to return... We want justice. Is this the condition of an officer who is serving the people? In agony, we the people of Ambasamudram, are waiting for you.*”

Photographs of people holding IPS officer Balveer Singh’s photo in their pooja rooms as well as in temples, portraying the suspended officer almost as a godly figure, were shared widely on social media.

The official from the intelligence department said it was all part of the propaganda to create a positive public impression about the accused officer.

The move had even shocked zonal level officers and **South First** has learnt that a section of police officers had opposed the “planted narrative” in favour of the suspended officer.



SP's transfer, assault of minor



Meanwhile, the Special Branch (SB) police attached to the Ambasamudram subdivision, which reports to the SP directly, has allegedly started intimidating journalists who were covering the issue on the ground.

“They took photographs and video-recorded a few journalists who were keen on reporting the police brutality,” a newspaper reporter said.

A team of police officials also allegedly tried to convince the victims and bribed them not to talk against the suspended ASP.

K Rajeshwari, whose 17-year-old son was allegedly subjected to torture by the ASP, told **South First** that two policemen threatened her, asking her not to reveal anything about the suspended ASP.

Rajeshwari initially deposed that her son was not subjected to torture.

“I was afraid. That is the reason we didn’t talk about the torture of my son. But after seeing the media reports, we got the courage and came forward and told all the truth to the sub-collector,” she said.

She said that the ASP had plucked two teeth from her son’s mouth.

On Monday, 3 April, the Tirunelveli SP had transferred two policemen — Bogan, attached to Vickramasingam police station, and Rajkumar, attached to Kallidaikurichi police station — to the Armed Reserve Platoon.

When asked about the reason for the transfer of SP P Saravanan, the senior police officer, who shared the backstory of the transfer with **South First**, said that pressure was mounting and the wrong moves of the district police was damaging the entire police department’s name.

“All the things happened under the nose of the SP and he cannot say that he was unaware of all the incidents. Hence the transfer,” the senior officer said.

Accusation about destroying evidence

South First also learnt that the CCTV footage of the police stations, matching the entry of ASP and remand time of the victims taken into the concerned police stations, were allegedly erased.

Sources from the police department also stated that the sub-collector, who is enquiring into the issue, had not called for the CCTV footage till now, and policemen from the concerned stations have not been called in for an inquiry.

“Except for the statements of the victims, there is no substantial evidence to prove that the ASP had tortured them. Even the tool used by the ASP to pluck the teeth of the victims has not been confiscated so far, which is the only material evidence in the case,” they said.

South First also learnt that the sub-collector enquiry is going on in crime number 69/2023 registered at Kallidaikurichi police station, but that is not the station where the alleged custodial torture took place.

The incident took place in the Ambasamudram police station under crime number 49/2023, and Vickramasingam police station under crime number 63/2023, where the suspended ASP Balveer Singh had allegedly tortured and plucked the teeth of the victims in custody.

It is also learnt that there was no notification issued for enquiry in these two police stations.

Questions by rights activists

B Veluchamy, a human rights activist who has been following the case from the beginning, told **South First** that when there are laws to initiate action in the case, the police department has chosen instead to go by Police Standing Orders (PSOs) which existed before the Protection of Human Rights Act came into effect.

“There is an attempt to dodge things in the name of enquiry to avoid filing an FIR against Balveer Singh. This PSO enquiry is an eye wash,” Veluchamy contended.

“Why were the two SB policemen transferred? Why was the SP transferred? It shows that the government believes that some gross violation has happened there and that is the reason for the suspensions and transfer. Then why are you covering it under a PSO enquiry instead of IPC or CrPC?”, he wondered.

He added, “There are reports that even minor children were subjected to custodial torture and even victims from Scheduled Caste were tortured by the ASP. All these attract various sections under IPC and those are enough to file an FIR without a complaint, as per the law.”

IPS Officers Association jumps in

Meanwhile, DGP Abhash Kumar, president of the Tamil Nadu IPS Officers' Association, issued a statement on Tuesday stating that media should “exercise discretion” in publishing news about the suspended ASP,

Pointing to the sub-collector's inquiry and the State Human Rights Commission's intervention, Abhash Kumar said: “Various forms of media are covering the issue in a selective manner and various vested interests are being propagated in social media to influence evidence, witnesses, investigating agencies and the public.”

“Such biased and pre-judged reporting may adversely affect the ongoing investigation. Hence, it is entreated to exercise discretion on publication of this matter in the media till the completion of the inquiry for the impartial administration of justice,” he said.

Reacting to the IPS Officers Association's statement, several senior journalists in the state have registered their condemnation.

Reacting to the statement, Henri Tiphagne, the executive director of People's Watch, told **South First** that if the government is interested in people, it would have registered an FIR and handed over the probe to an external investigation agency like CBCID.

“But now the IPS Officers' Association president has issued a statement saying that there is a media trial going on and it is very clear on whose side the IPS Officers' Association is. The police are stooping to a very low level.”

“Only the media exposure and public pressure have led to the few follow-ups that we are witnessing today — whether it is the suspension of Balveer Singh IPS; placing SP Saravanan again on compulsory wait and the transfer of SB policemen, etc. This association had never opened its mouth when a senior male IPS officer had sexually harassed a woman IPS officer,” he said.

Stating that the senior police officers should go to the people and tell the victims and people that nobody can threaten them, Henry said: “That's where an enquiry will be fair.”

The People's Watch also issued a statement condemning the IPS Officers Association.

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