

## **This Top Cop Is Accused of Extreme Torture Including ‘Crushing Testicles’ and Pulling Teeth**

An average of five people die in police custody in India every day, according to official data.

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Santosh Kumar, 17, said he was detained by the police for being involved in a brawl in his neighbourhood in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Kumar and his brother were brought into the police station by cops in connection to an altercation on March 10. Once there, he was stunned to see six other men – who were brought in earlier for being involved in the same brawl – half naked and bleeding from their mouths. Then, the officials turned to him.

“One shouted at me and told me to strip,” he said. Then, he alleges, a senior police official named Balveer Singh started beating him with a baton. After a brief pause, Singh, who held the high rank of assistant superintendent, picked up a stone and told Kumar to open his mouth wide.

“When I did, he started violently grinding that stone against my teeth. I started bleeding,” he said. “He then stomped on my chest with his boots and continued hitting me.”

The torture went on for two hours, Kumar said, while the other young men in custody watched. After that, he watched Singh do the same to the rest of them.

Kumar is among 12 men, including four who were detained for alleged offences not connected to the brawl, whose accusations against Singh have put a spotlight on police brutality in India. His and nine other detainees’ testimonies were shared with VICE World News by People’s Watch, a Tamil Nadu-based social justice organisation providing legal assistance to the victims.

Three men accused Singh of “crushing” their testicles with his bare hands. Eight said he pulled out their teeth using pliers. Some said Singh also threatened to mutilate them.

Police brutality is endemic in India, where police violence such as forceful crowd control measures to fatal beatings of people in custody is common. An average of five people died in police custody every day from 2010 to 2020, according to official human rights [data](#). Officials incriminated in acts of brutality, on the other hand, are rarely punished.

Henri Tiphagne, the executive director of People’s Watch, told VICE World News that while Balveer Singh’s case highlights the rampant abuse of power by top-ranking police, it is also exceptional.

“In cases of torture, top cops prefer to give directions,” he said. “But this is a weird one of him being involved directly and exclusively, and preventing others from doing it.”

In all the alleged cases, Singh changed out of his uniform and put on a pair of shorts, a T-shirt and gloves in preparation of the alleged torture. “It’s like he’s stepping in for

an operation,” Tiphagne said. “Then he would take a stone and carry out the horrible acts with his own hands.”

This was reiterated by Arun, Kumar’s brother who was also detained that day, during a press conference last week. He said he saw Singh changing clothes before two cops violently pinned him down for Singh to torture. He lost four teeth that day.

VICE World News reviewed victims’ statements and all of them have one common link: Singh went after their teeth—using either pliers or stones. One victim said he was forced to chew stones until his mouth bled.

“This indicates a sick mindset. The first thing the chief minister [of Tamil Nadu] should do is subject [Singh] to psychiatric evaluation,” Tiphagne added.

Singh was suspended on March 29 while eight other cops were transferred. Human rights advocates now demand an official police complaint against Singh, but the state has instead appointed a more senior police official to probe the allegations, which people say is not enough.

In the meantime, local news outlets reported that cops from that police station have intimidated and coerced the accusers into changing their statements. Tiphagne confirmed this and said that one of the victims did retract his statement. “They’re being forced to say that they broke their teeth after falling down,” he said. “This is an attempt to erase evidence of any kind.”

Last week, some news outlets reported that the CCTV recordings – mandatory across all police stations in India – from the days of the torture aren’t available, with the police station staff claiming technical issues.

Many in the Indian police – stretched thin and understaffed – believe beatings of detainees are essential to maintain law and order, according to a 2019 police report by Common Cause, a civil society organisation, and the Lokniti Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, a research institute supported by the Indian government.

Tamil Nadu is among the top five Indian states with the highest number of police custodial deaths. Data from 2001 to 2018 show 1,727 custodial deaths but no convictions of any members of police. In the last few years, the state has seen high-profile cases including sexual assault. In 2020, the violent deaths of a father and his son sparked nationwide anger after details of their injuries – bleeding rectums, a punctured lung and internal bleeding – revealed one of the worst cases of torture and death in police detention.

Despite the mounting accusations, Singh has received backing from his police peers. Last week, the Tamil Nadu Indian Police Service Officers’ Association – made up of cops who’ve cleared one of India’s toughest exams to get coveted ranks – published a statement in support of Singh and accused journalists of bias and of running a “media trial.”

Tiphagne said there's a jarring silence by the higher and district judiciary despite growing evidence of a pattern of abuse by police. "Now our biggest concern is: Who will stand with us?" he said.

Rajeshwari, Kumar's mother, told VICE World News that she wants Singh brought to justice. "This whole incident has physically and mentally affected us. We want protection, justice and compensation."

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/88xnxk/india-tamil-nadu-police-brutality-torture-balveer-singh>