


Lack of political will in TN to prevent caste crimes

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While activists and politicians demand a special law for 'honour killings', it is time to examine what has been done, and what governments have failed to do. (Photo | Pexels)

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Even as the uproar on the 'custodial death' of Ajithkumar and the suicide of Rithanya due to dowry harassment continues, the 'honour killing' of Dalit youth Kavin Selvaganesh has raised troubling questions about Tamil Nadu's socio-political climate. This murder shatters the belief that education can keep caste discrimination at bay. While activists and politicians demand a special law for 'honour killings', it is time to examine what has been done, and what governments have failed to do.

Is this an isolated event?

While Tamil Nadu's Dravidian movement is often celebrated for its social justice legacy, caste-based violence and 'honour killings' persist. Twenty-seven-year-old Kavin was killed over his relationship with a dominant caste woman. Southern districts have seen recurring caste violence, often involving students. In Nanguneri, Tirunelveli, a Dalit boy was hacked by classmates from a dominant caste after prolonged bullying, prompting the government to form a one-man committee under Justice Chandru in 2023. Two years later, in 2025 another Dalit boy was hacked, losing his fingers after leading his team to victory in a kabaddi match against dominant caste players. 'Honour killings' have perpetuated in the state from Kannagi-Murugesan in 2003 to Kavin's murder now. Many cases remain unreported, disguised as suicides in rural areas. Despite reformers like Periyar, caste remains, as Dr B R Ambedkar said, "a state of mind". A civil society report documents 65 'honour killings' in Tamil Nadu since 2017. The systemic failure in the implementation of the already existing provisions and directives enables such crimes.

What did the government do so far?

Following the Nanguneri violence, the Justice Chandru Committee recommended measures, the lack of implementation of which highlights the lack of commitment of the 'social justice' model.

In 2016, the Madras High Court, alarmed by rising 'honour' crimes, ordered proactive measures in *B Dilipkumar vs The Secretary to Government* case. The current NHRC chairperson, Justice V Ramasubramanian, in the judgment directed the state government to set up special cells in every district constituting the Superintendent of Police, the District Social Welfare Officer, and the District Adi-Dravida Welfare Officer, a 24-hour helpline, and counselling for parents opposing inter-caste marriages. The judgment repeatedly emphasised on "eradication of the evil of caste".

However, a recent RTI, almost a decade later, revealed that no district has a designated special cell including Tuticorin and Tirunelveli, where Kavin's murder took place. Some districts claimed no complaints on 'honour killings'. TN Social Welfare Minister Geetha Jeevan's recent admission of ignorance about the special cells further highlights systemic neglect.

At the national level, nothing much has been done despite the Law Commission's 242nd Report recommending the Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the Name of Honour and Tradition) Bill. Neither this nor the Supreme Court's 2018 *Shakti Vahini* judgment spurred Parliament to act. Even Rajasthan's proposed bill never translated into an Act.

Lack of political will and dying Dalits

These failures point to the political utility of caste divisions. Despite judicial orders and call for special laws, everything is kept in abeyance for obvious reasons. Lack of awareness of such laws and judgments among the marginalised calls for an increased participation from the government. A moment has come in time to do more than just the ritual outrage during every Dalit's death, to build a robust system that puts an end to these 'honour' crimes. What is needed now is not merely a symbolic solidarity, but courageous leadership committed to action, thereby restoring public faith that this government is genuine in the pursuit of true social justice.

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