



Crying shame! Five years after Thoothukudi firing, no official prosecuted

Anti-Sterlite activist Merina Prabhu said the DMK government did not walk the talk. "They promised befitting action before coming to power, but action is missing now," he said.

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THOOTHUKUDI: Five years after 13 civilians were killed in police firing in Thoothukudi during anti-Sterlite protests, police and revenue officials found guilty by the Aruna Jegadeesan inquiry committee have not been prosecuted yet. The Aruna Jegadeesan committee appointed to probe into the incident has indicted 17 police personnel and four revenue officials for the deaths between May 22 and 23 in 2018.

The case was probed by both the CBI and the inquiry commission. The CBI, which took over the case on August 14, 2018, from the CB-CID as directed by the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, had charge-sheeted 101 people and Thirumalai, a police inspector. The officer was later promoted to DSP.

The Jegadeesan panel that investigated the incident for four years at a cost of 5.5 crore, held 17 police personnel responsible for police excesses and four revenue officials for lapses. While one of them was an IAS officer, there were three deputy tahsildars, three IPS officers, one DSP, three inspectors, two sub-inspectors and eight police constables. Many of them were promoted to higher posts later.

The report found constables Raja, Sathish Kumar and Mathavan guilty of using weapons to gun down Karthick, Jayaraman and Kaliappan, respectively, while constable Sudalaikannu was held solely responsible for killing Manirajan, Shanmugam, Selvaraj and Jansi Rani. Corroborating with evidence and witnesses, the retired judge had concluded that either Constable Shankar or SI Rennes had a role in shooting down Tamilarasan and Kanthaiyah at the district collectorate. Similarly, SI Sornamani or constable Sudalaikannu had killed Ranjith on the collectorate campus, constable Thandavamurthy or Sudalaikannu had killed Snowlin, and Sudalaikannu or constable Sathish Kumar must have shot dead Glaston outside the

collectorate, the one man commission report said while recommending criminal action against them.

Apart from police personnel, the commission suggested departmental action against the then collector Venkatesh for his commissions and omissions and suggested initiation of departmental action and other actions known to law against three special executive magistrates/deputy tahsildars --- Sekar, Chandran and Kannan --- as the commission did not accept their explanations for allegedly issuing shooting orders.

A sister of the deceased victim told *TNIE*, "Why has the government not arrested the police personnel who were found guilty of killing 13 people by the Aruna Jegadeesan committee? The government must register FIR against each of these personnel and they must be detained to render justice to the victims' families," she said.

An RTI reply said the state government had placed DSP Thirumalai, head constables Shankar, Sudalaikannu, and Satheeshkumar under suspension pending inquiry since October 17, 2022. The suspension order of constable M Shankar accessed by *TNIE* said he was suspended over pending grave charges against him for certain lapses detailed in the report of the commission of inquiry by Justice Aruna Jegadeesan.

Anti-Sterlite activist Merina Prabhu said the DMK government did not walk the talk. "They promised befitting action before coming to power, but action is missing now," he said.

Henri Tiphagne, executive director, People's Watch, said the state government must take steps to get permission from the HC for further investigation by a special investigation team, on the basis of evidence in Aruna Jegadeesan's report as per Section 173(8) of Criminal Procedure Code. "The 17 police officers and four revenue officials named in the report must be placed under suspension immediately until they are prosecuted," he said. While the CBI held rioters responsible for violence, the Jegadeesan committee report held the police guilty of killing civilian protesters.

Activist Krishnamurthy told *TNIE*, "We cannot accept the CBI's chargesheet, as it was partial. The CM should break the silence and ensure justice for the people. The victims will get justice, only if those found guilty are punished."

A bureaucrat told *TNIE* that the Aruna Jegadeesan report is also biased as it did not hold the protesters accountable for the mob activity that unfolded after the police opened fire. There is a need for further investigation, he said.

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