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Instances of torture are still rampant in pockets of State: study

Special Correspondent



MSSRF Chairman M. S. Swaminathan and RGNIYD director and vice chancellor Michael Vetha Siromony interacting with the victims of torture at a meeting in Chennai on Sunday. Photo: K.V. Srinivasan

Instances of torture ranging from custodial harassment to caste-driven violence are still rampant in pockets of the State, according to activists who observed the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture here on Sunday.

The observance to express solidarity with victims of torture and also to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking was organised jointly by the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).

One of the case studies presented by the NGO 'Peoples' Watch' involved a kurava community woman in Naduveerapattu in Cuddalore district whose spouse was randomly picked up by police in 2010 for questioning in connection with a "scuffle" and subjected to fatal custodial torture.

"We have been scrambling from pillar to post for justice. But, we have not even got a death certificate yet," said Kasturi. Petitions to the National and State Human Rights Commissions yielded no response and the victim has approached the Madras High Court for justice.

"We strongly suspect that a hush-up over the incident as one of the perpetrators is said to have political connections," said Jayaraman of Peoples' Watch.

Another tale from Kambilimedu village in Cuddalore involved Shanthi whose spouse was assaulted to death in a caste row. "There were a few token arrests but the real perpetrators are still at large," said Shanthi.

Similar stories of horror were shared by victims who came from Cuddalore, Madurai and Tuticorin. "So common are such incidents that it is almost as if Indian society is permissive of torture," said P. Michael Vetha Siromony, Director and Vice-Chancellor of RGNIYD.

Inaugurating the discussions, he said that in many cases it was the State (in the form of police) that was the biggest perpetrator of torture.

Abject poverty is the common denominator in forms of abuse, whether it is torture, human trafficking or substance abuse, he said.

On social issues like tobacco and alcohol abuse, the State appeared to be following a confused policy in allowing tobacco cultivation on the one hand and advocating warning signs on cigarette packs on the other, or opening more

TASMAC shops and then sanctioning de-addiction centres, he said. Ajay K. Parida, MSSRF Executive Director, said the significance of such observances was that they helped a better appreciation of the issues, their magnitude and also the roles that individuals could perform to counter the problem.

Often, social inequities provided the trigger for victimisation, and the widening divide between the rich and the poor created the ideal grounds for various forms of exploitation, he said.

K. Shekar, from the RGNIYD, said though substance abuse was inextricably linked to the fortunes of the youth and symbolised contra-culture, there was a dearth of studies on this aspect of the phenomenon by social scientists, academicians and NGOs.

One of the primary objectives of the workshop was to create awareness and sensitise youth to torture, drug abuse and illicit trafficking, he said.

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