

Case: The Dharmapuri attacks

In Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu, an angry mob of approximately 1,000 Vanniyars, a social group who consider themselves 'superior' to Dalits in India's caste hierarchy, succeeded in looting and torching as many as 400 houses in three Dalit communities with police remaining as onlookers.

The attacks took place in the wake of an inter-caste marriage between a Vanniyar woman and a Dalit man. Following the suicide of the woman's father, the mob ransacked the villages of Natham, Anna Nagar and Kondampatti over a period of two-three hours. The inhabitants sought safety in a nearby village. Only when the villages had already suffered much destruction, did the police move in. Since the incident, 142 suspected attackers have been arrested.

There are indications that the suicide was used as a pretext for carrying out an already planned attack, the purpose of which may have been to destroy the economic infrastructure of the Dalit communities. In recent years, the Dalits have become increasingly assertive, while the Vanniyars appear to have stagnated economically. Prior to – and following – the incident, political forces in Tamil Nadu that appeal to the Vanniyar vote made strong anti-Dalit statements.

The estimated 1,500 victims of these attacks have suffered numerous human rights abuses, including violations of the right to physical security; the right to be free from violence; the right to housing, the right to marriage on free will; and the right to fair access to justice. Even though the police knew about the risk of an attack, they did not take any action to prevent it. Following the incident, three police officials have been suspended.

News reports and analysis – Dharmapuri attacks:

[Three Dalit colonies face mob fury](#) (The Hindu)

[A wedding and a funeral](#) (The Hindu)

[Dalits: Attacks were meant to destroy our resurgence](#) (Times of India)

[Attacks on Dalits was planned](#) (The Hindu)

[Dalit students face discrimination in Dharmapuri](#) (The Hindu)

[Caste fury](#) (Frontline Magazine)

[500 Dalit homes burnt... and a news blip](#) (Tehelka)

Other information – Dharmapuri attacks:

[Attacks on Dalits of Dharmapuri – a fact finding report](#) (countercurrents.org)

[Caste and honour](#) (countercurrents.org)

[Henri Tiphagne's blog on the incident](#)

[Dharmapuri atrocity – preliminary report](#) (EVIDENCE)

[Mob burns hundreds of Dalit homes](#) (IDSN)

This case briefing has been prepared by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (www.idsn.org)