

To
Mr M K Rathore IPS
Assistant Superintendent of Police
Madipakkam
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From
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Subject: Incidents on Dec. 15, 2004 relating to Muttukkadu Village -
Arresting me without a cause and brutally disrupting villagers' rights
to worship.

Sir,

I am constrained, as a victim of your actions, to place on record my views of your conduct as an officer of the police force. This narration, which will be circulated widely, will enable readers to conclude whether your behaviour amounts to fair play in law enforcement or to one that reeks of transparent bias.

I realise very well that you could not have acted on your own volition and that there were probably other pressures on you. But to me and the villagers of Muttukkadu, your name and face represented the police force and therefore the events and consequences unfortunately, become your personal burden.

At around 11am on Dec 15, I received a call from the Inspector, Neelankarai police station, saying several people of Karikkattu Kuppam, had gathered on the temple lands adjacent to the MGM Beach Resorts. He informed me that MGM Beach Resorts, adjacent to the lands, was feeling threatened for its safety and that I should go over there to find out what was going on. I assuaged his fears and informed him that they were only planning a puja. I nevertheless offered to go and check.

Even as I was walking towards that land which is about 600 metres

away, I received, yet another call on my mobile from the Sub Inspector, Neelankarai expressing similar anxiety.

When I reached the spot, MGM's officers were standing around, and the villagers were sitting on the lawn. Everything was peaceful. I called the SI and explained that the villagers were planning to offer puja on the last day of Karthigai and were going to disperse thereafter. Because their makeshift brick shrines were repeatedly being thrown away, they had brought a trident to set into the ground. On the SI's request over my mobile, I walked over to MGM's officers and reassured them that they need fear no threat.

In a while, a posse of lathi swinging constables arrived and began arguments with the villagers. As tempers rose, I again intervened to becalm everyone. The constables were persuaded that the villagers meant no harm but were only trying to revive their ancient rights to worship, rudely interrupted by MGM Beach resorts in recent years.

At around 1.30 pm you arrived on the spot. First, you asked me for a presentation. Which briefly, is that any lease that MGM Resorts had from the Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments [HR&CE] had ended in June, 04 and even that lease was only for the enjoyment of the produce of the 88 coconut trees standing there. They had no rights ever, to use the land on which the trees stood. Regardless, they had cut over 60 coconut trees, filled up a pond and destroyed a shrine where villagers have worshipped ancestrally. Since June,04, MGM has continued to illegally 'occupy' the land and keeps conducting late night parties where alcoholic drinks are served. The villagers religious sentiments have been offended further, by MGM using muscle power to intimidate them when they try to offer worship.

In culmination of these events spread over the last two years, MGM foisted a false case on the village headman a few months ago. That was when ECCO [East Coast Citizen's Organisation] of which I am the President, began to interact with them and offer them counsel. We finally managed to persuade HR&CE to come in to the picture and state their point of view. I showed you their sworn affidavit which named MGM Anand to be a trespasser.

You were polite and patient. You heard me. When you said MGM claims a current lease, I said I doubted that, but if they did have one, you could show that to the villagers and persuade them to disperse. You went away, consulted the junior police officers who were there, made a few calls and when you returned you were a changed man. You told me that you will hear no more of my reasoning but that you were arresting me for disrupting the law and order. With a stunned crowd watching, you had me hustled into a jeep that sped me away to the Neelankarai police station.

I was kept there from 2.30 pm. At 3.30 I was told that I am to meet you. Instead, I was hustled into an auto-rickshaw and escorted by a policeman, taken to an All Women's Police Station. On arrival my cell phone was seized. I was made to sit in a corner without being able to contact anyone. This went on till 9.30 pm when I was 'released'.

But my 'release' did not happen until lawyers Dr. V. Suresh, Ms. D. Nagasaila and Mr. T.Mohan had descended on the police station. Not until the media began calling you asking for my whereabouts [to whom you kept stating blithely, that you were puzzled by their queries as you were on 'CM's bandobust duty']. Not before, you had directed deception, intimidation and misinformation towards my friends and fellow-villagers who came looking for me. Neelankarai police station was sending them on a wild goose chase.

The reasons for all this became apparent to me after 9.30 pm, when a welcoming throng of villagers met me on 'release' and told me what happened when I was held in isolation. I have eye-witnesses for what I state below.

You took charge of the police force which until your arrival had been calm and understanding. You told the villagers that no one had the right to come into the land as there was a 'dispute' and that an 'injunction' existed [-- a mythical one as it turned out]. That the trident will be respected in its place. People were to disperse. That a select group must come to PDN Kalyana Mandapam at 5.30 pm for a meeting. When some of the villagers doubted your statements -- rightly, as it turned out--, you threatened them with a lathi charge. In a minute, you ordered one. There were several women in the

crowd and your policemen approached them menacingly. But I also know, many of the policemen managed to connect with their human core and suggested to you that they be given more time to manage the crowd. Villagers finally left with your promise that they can return to worship and that the trident will be untouched.

At the meeting later that evening, the discussions began with police officers asking the villagers why they were antagonistic to MGM. Why were they interested in objecting to MGM seeking and gaining a new lease. Why were they refusing to 'talk' without D V Sridharan's presence. What was his 'connection' to them. All in all, the collective efforts of your self and other officers exceeded anything MGM's own PR or marketing departments could have mustered. When you asked the villagers to stay off the land for just '5 days' before another 'peace' meeting, they began to be confirmed that your were in fact negotiating on behalf of commercial interests and not in any public one. Soon, it was revealed that under your direct guidance the trident had been uprooted. The villagers got the plot in full and stormed out.

Some of the other incidents in the saga have to be set down for the record:

-- You repeatedly said [1-] that there was a lease on the temple lands in MGM's favour and later, [2-] that there was a court injunction. A call to MGM's counsel prompted by you, drew a blank on either count.

--When 1 and 2 did not pass muster, you said [3-] that your intervention was due to a general law and order concern. You later said that villagers were pelting stones and rocks. [As they had not been arrested and I was, presumably your case is that I was organising the mythical stone throwing.]

--At a minimum, you came insufficiently informed of facts to the scene, prompted by a commercial interest's phone call or someone's on its behalf. Once at the scene, confronted by evidence that shot everyone of your premises down, you kept offering new ones. But none of this raised any doubts in your mind about the veracity of your complainant. You clearly had a predetermined task to execute.

--In all the time you were there, you did not cross-examine the admiring officers of MGM who, cell phones in hands, watched with growing satisfaction how you were delivering 'law and order' to them. You had come prepared with a closed mind. You 'knew' what had to be achieved. You provided them legalised muscle clad in police uniform.

--All the time we were talking, there was calm and peace, with the villagers half-way through their puja. I suggested that you receive MGM's complaint and direct them to approach the HR&CE the owners of the land. That was when you realised your plans were going awry. You calmly, but politely told me you were arresting me on charge of disrupting law and order.

Well Sir, although I address all this to you, I realise that you are but a part of the system and could not have acted on your own. The simple fact is that your actions had no justification in the ground reality. It only had to do with a predetermined objective: destroy all signs of worship by villagers on their ancient land and to deliver it for use by a commercial encroacher. I must say you carried the day and delivered on your assignment.

As a man of 63, I am saddened by two things I have become aware of. One, the rich are able to co-opt the police for achieving their ends using fine sounding phrases like law and order. How easily the police go blind and see only a blur of poor people whereas they are in fact, as real as you and me.

The second is of a greater sadness for me. For the last six months as the President of East Coast Citizen's organisation [ECCO] I have been preaching to the villagers, the way of Gandhi, the majesty of law and the need to stay free of prejudices. The people of the Kuppam too have come to learn the ways of addressing their grievances through the government departments, the legal process and the media. The incidents of Dec 15, over which you presided have thoroughly disillusioned them. You have reconfirmed their suspicions of police bias. They saw how they were powerless in the face of summary behaviour by the police. As a consequence, I discern for the first time, a tendency in them to see their worship issue in saffron

colours. If ever the issue gets politicised, you will have played no small part in pushing them in that direction. You were not sensitive enough to realise that a harmless symbol of worship was no threat to anyone. You trampled on their sentiments by directing it to be so brutally uprooted and placed in police custody.

As a realist, I know this letter will have no consequence for you as a policeman. I work on the basis that among the several officials I meet to help evict MGM, the land encroacher, I will one day meet someone with a sense of fair-play and conscience. I have met several who have sympathised with the cause of the villagers but were powerless to act. You Sir, had an opportunity to show you were a fair officer. Even if you had 'orders', you could have found a middle ground that would have left the villagers satisfied you were even handed. I regret you lost an opportunity to demonstrate that police acts only in public interest.

Today I find my leadership abilities weakened. Villagers saw how I was treated and wonder what might be their own fate. They are turning away from me to hear new voices. On that day you decided not to hear my voice of reason and calm. Today, they refuse to. Can you blame them?

With warm regards, nevertheless,

D V Sridharan
Dec 17, 2004