



**Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Congregation  
Our Lady of Lourdes Province, Pondy - Cuddalore**

**REPORT ABOUT THE VIOLENT INCIDENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE AT THE CAMPUS OF  
LITTLE FLOWER HR. SEC. SCHOOL, SITUATED AT CHINNASALEM TOWN  
PANCHAYAT, VILLUPURAM DIST.**

**ON 25.03.2019 AND 26.03.2019**

1. Little Flower Hr. Sec. School, situated at Chinnasalem has been providing quality education for over 74 years to the children from the most backward families, both boys and girls. It is run by the catholic religious Congregation, Immaculate Heart of Mary having its Headquarters in Puducherry. Over 2150 students both boys and girls study in this school. 117 poor girls hailing from nearby villages study in the school staying in the boarding home run by the same management. Little Flower Hr. Secondary School, during the past 74 years, has provided academic as well as life education to over 45,000 boys and girls to lead a dignified life in the society.
2. Series of unfortunate incidents that took place in this premier school on 25.03.2019, and thereafter have been the cause of much agony and concern. On 25.03.2019 the boarding girls returned to the boarding home after writing their 10<sup>th</sup> Maths public exam and while the other girls were taking their lunch, one of them went to the first floor and committed suicide by hanging. As soon as the sister in-charge of the boarding came to know about the incident, she informed the police and parents of the girl.
3. The loss of life because of this incident has been the cause of inconsolable sorrow for the parents while it has also plunged the school sisters, staff and the students into deep distress and sorrow. The management is ready to extend its full cooperation to the police investigation. However subsequent to this incident murderous attack, violence unleashed against the sisters, the teachers and the students and the arson carried out against the school has left everybody in utter shock. This report is intended to present the facts of what happened and the background to this incident.

4. 10<sup>th</sup> Std students had Maths public exam on 25.03.2019. 272 students both boys and girls of Little Flower Hr. Sec. School wrote the exam. After the exam all the boarding girls returned to the boarding. They gathered and sat down in the ground floor and were sharing among themselves that the Maths exam was tough and they might fail; that made them to break down and weep. After a consoling prayer, the girls went for their natural needs and returned to take their lunch. While they were looked after by the boarding warden Miss. Easwari she had to go to meet the parents of Keerthana, one of the inmates who had come to meet her. At that time around 1.45pm two students, Sathiya and Sivadharshini, went to the first floor to collect their Science textbooks. To their utter shock, they found Poonguzhali, one of the inmates, hanging herself from the ceiling hook with a shawl. They immediately rushed down screaming and informed the boarding warden about it. And the boarding warden Miss. Easwari at once rushed to the spot and was shocked to find Poonguzhali hanging. Immediately she informed about the incident to Sr. Sahayam the boarding in-charge through her mobile.
5. That day Sr. Sahayam, the boarding in-charge, after invigilation duty at the Govt. School at Thottiam was returning. As she was approaching the school she received the news about the incident and she immediately informed Sr. Headmistress and the Local Superior of the Convent. On receiving the information the school Headmistress Sr. Amalorpavam rushed to the place of the incident, found Poonguzhali hanging and was shocked. She immediately informed the police station at Chinnaselam through her mobile. She also tried to contact the parents of Poonguzhali through her mobile but could not contact them as they did not pick up the call. She enquired the students as to how it had happened and she wanted to know from them the background of this incident. The students told her as having heard from Poonguzhali telling them, "I have not done the Maths exam well, I am afraid, I would fail. The marriage of my sister is fixed on the day of the publication of the results of 10<sup>th</sup> Std. If I were to fail, it would be a big shame to me and to my family. My father and my mother would kill me even."
6. In the mean time the Police Sub Inspector had arrived; a little later other police also reached the place. The VAO, the Tashildar, RDO, and the Police Inspector had also arrived. They called the friends of Poonguzhali and enquired about the incident. They told them what they had heard from Poonguzhali prior to the incident.

7. The Sub Inspector enquired if information had been given to the parents of the girl. Sr. Amalorpavam replied that they had tried to contact the parents but they were not picking up the calls. The Inspector himself then tried to contact the parents through his mobile and he also did not succeed. Then the Sub Inspector contacted the Sub Inspector of Rshivandhiyam Police Station and asked him to inform the parents of Poonguzhali about the incident. As the arrival of the parents of Poonguzhali was getting delayed the police decided to remove the body and sent it to Mundiampakkam Govt. Hospital Villupuram for postmortem.
8. At 6 pm of the same day Mr. Vemban, the father of Poonguzhali, along with 60 people came to the main gate of the school and shouted to open the gate. Even before bringing the key to open the gate they jumped over it came inside and broke the lock of the gate. As soon as they entered, they started attacking Mrs. Jayamary who was bringing the key of the gate and also Sr. Berna who came along with her. They snatched their mobile phones and smashed them on the ground. The Headmistress Sr. Amalorpavam noticing the violence, immediately informed the police about it. Receiving the news, the Inspector, Sub Inspector, and over 10 constables came to the school. The parents of Poonguzhali and others who had come with them, asked why they were not informed about the incident immediately and why the body of the girl was taken away even before they arrived. The Sub Inspector told them that the school authorities as well as the police had tried to contact them several times but they were not picking up the phone. Hence the police had decided to remove the body and sent it for postmortem. Then the crowd moved away.

However at 11.30 pm Mr. Gunasekaran, former President of Chinnasalam Town Panchayat, came to the school along with Mr. Shanmugam and Mr. Babu and with the Sub Inspector. They demanded from the management of the school Rs.10 Lakhs as compensation. On behalf of the management it was stated that the management had not committed anything wrong and that it cannot give the money which they demand. Since they had been demanding forcefully it was informed on behalf of the management that a sum of Rupees One lakh and fifty thousand could be given to the parents on humanitarian grounds and also to meet the funeral expenses. Mr. Shanmugam and Mr. Babu who had come on behalf of the parents had accepted this offer.

Thereafter they both contacted over the phone one Mr. Velmurugan of Keezhkuppam and informed him about this settlement. Within a short time a group of 5 persons came to the school and said that they would not accept anything less than Rs. 6 lakhs. On behalf of the management it was informed firmly that it could not agree to that. They left the place angrily stating that they knew how they could get this amount from the management.

9. In these circumstances the school authorities approached Chinnasalem police for protection. Accepting their request 5 police constables came to the school for the protection of the school and the sisters. They remained till 8 am. of the following day 26.03.2019 and left the school stating that they have other tasks to do.
10. The school declared holiday on 26.03.2019 as a mark of mourning to the deceased student Poonguzhali. However 10<sup>th</sup> std students both boys and girls were asked to come to the school to prepare for the public exams.
11. Around 9 am more than 200 people, men and women came to the school carrying with them dangerous and sharp weapons. They entered the school breaking the main gate and jumping over the compound wall. They went in different groups and simultaneously attacked the school, convent and the boarding home. One group with murderous vengeance went to Little Flower Block of the school and assaulted Sr. Amalorpavam Headmistress, Mrs. Hema, Mrs. Padmini and four sisters namely Sr. Berna, Sr. Arokia Selvi, Sr. Bency and Sr. Vino with bricks, stones, iron rods, sticks, and iron pipes who were on duty. They also attacked in similar way the students both boys and girls who were preparing themselves for the exams and the office staff Mrs. Usha and Mrs. Chithra.
12. The students ran in fear for life helter-skelter for cover. In order to protect the students from any danger, the sisters were trying to stop the unruly attackers. The women among the group attacked the sisters with brooms and sticks, pushed them down, kicked on their bellies, and pulled their sarees while using abusive words against them, in order to disgrace and humiliate them. They did not stop at that; they pulled the neck chain with crucifix worn by the sisters as the mark of their religious profession, tried to strangle them, snatched the chains and threw them on the ground. While the sisters were struggling to protect themselves the boys took them to the classrooms and protected them.

13. At the same time another group rushed to the office of the Headmistress, ransacked the office of the headmistress, office of the school, laboratories and classrooms. They smashed the equipments, computers, costly furnishings, electrical and electronic gadgets, glass doors and windows. Some of them seized Sr. Arockia Selvi who was in the office, dragged her out of the office to the open, rudely assaulted her with rods and sticks, pulled her saree, and left her in deep shock and pain fearing for life. Simultaneously some among them went to the first floor, entered the classrooms and smashed the smart boards and electronic accessories and cctv cameras.
14. Simultaneously another group rushed to the convent of the sisters situated within the campus, broke open the main door, smashed furnishings; they broke open the private rooms of the sisters, ransacked the rooms; they entered the chapel of the convent, broke the windows and furnishings and especially broke and desecrated the alter which Christians consider as sacred. They also smashed and broke the head of the very old statue of Little Flower, Patroness of the school erected within the campus of the school.
15. Another group during the same time reached the boarding home, situated within the campus of the school, entered the home and smashed the TV, doors, windows and broke down the water pipe lines, including drinking water and drainage pipe lines.
16. As soon as the violent attacks by the unruly gangs started, the police was informed of it and protection was requested. But even before the police arrived at the school the violent gangsters completed their acts of rampage and the campus looked like a war torn zone. Hearing the cries of the sisters, the teachers and the students, the parents and the general public came to the school rushing; seeing them the violent gangsters began to leave the scene; at the same time the police also entered the place and tried to restore calm. The parents started taking their children out.
17. The sisters and other victims of the violence namely Sr. Amalorpavam, Sr. Berna, Sr. Arokia Selvi, Sr. Bency, Sr. Vino Arockiam and Mrs. Hema - teacher, Mrs. Padmini - teacher, Mrs. Chitra and Mrs. Usha both office staff were taken to the Govt. Hospital at Kallakuruchi and were admitted as in- patients for treatment. Two others were given treatment as out patients in a private hospital.
18. After all these incidents on 26<sup>th</sup> at 11.00a.m, the DSP, the Inspector, the Sub Inspector and some police constables came to the school along with the parents of Poonguzhali and some others. The police told the sisters that the people are demanding an enhanced amount of compensation and that unless it was given, they would not receive the body of Poonguzhali.

The police suggested that the sisters could consider to give an enhanced amount of compensation and settle the issue amicably. After prolonged discussions and arguments it was informed on behalf of the management that no compensation would be given but for the expenses of the funeral, only Rs.50, 000 would be given. This proposal was accepted, Rs.50, 000 was given and they went away with the money.

19. Consequent to the violent attacks and rampage carried out by the gangsters, the damage caused to the school, the convent and the boarding home is estimated by the engineers at Rupees more than One Crore. The students particularly those of the 10<sup>th</sup> standard are still in deep shock and fear. They fear that their teachers and the sisters might be attacked again at anytime. They are deeply worried that their future would be seriously affected.

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE INCIDENTS DESCRIBED ABOVE LEADS TO THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:**

1. It is evident that the violence unleashed against the school, the destruction inflicted upon it is premeditated and organized. The gangs which arrived at the school carrying dangerous weapons, proceeded in groups and carried out the attacks simultaneously and completed their operations within a fixed time amply verify this.
2. The gangsters had specifically targeted the religious sisters. The physical attacks, the snatching of the chain of the sisters with the crucifix, a sign of their religious vows and the pulling of their sarees demonstrate that they intended to humiliate them, to offend their religious dignity and to threaten them.
3. They had entered and ransacked the chapel, the place of worship, destroyed the sacred articles, smashed and broke the altar. They had smashed and broke the statue of Little Flower, the Patroness of the school. These are acts which offend the Christian religious sentiments and the Christian religion.
4. It is really painful and shocking that even after carrying out murderous attacks on persons and causing deliberate destruction to the properties, the gangsters came along with the police to demand enhanced compensation which is not justifiable. It is a very cruel act which expresses their violent mindset.

**IN ORDER TO RESTITUTE THE LOSS, RENDER JUSTICE AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE, THE FOLLOWING MEASURES ARE REQUIRED TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE COMPETENT AUTHORITIES:**

1. All those involved in the violence described above, must be arrested and punished as per Law.
2. Adequate protection must be given to the students studying in the school and the teachers, non-teaching staff and sisters working in the school.
3. Compensation for the loss incurred by the school, estimated at Rs. One crore and more must be collected from those who caused the damage and paid to the school.
4. All the mobile phones, sim cards snatched from the sisters and staffs during the violence must be given back to them. Adequate compensation for those mobile phones is to be given in case they are damaged.
5. The Govt. of Tamil Nadu must ensure that such incidents do not recur in future, that Catholic Women Religious are given adequate protection for their life and their religious dignity and that Educational Institutions run by the Christian Minorities are given adequate protection.

**Place: Cuddalore**

**Date: 01.04.2019**



**Yours Sincerely**

*Devaseer Mary*

**(Sr. Devaseer Mary, FIHM)**

**PROVINCIAL  
Immaculate Heart of Mary Provincialate,  
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