



Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

National Coordination Office

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Shri A. K. Parashar

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Joint Registrar

National Human Rights Commission

Manav Adhikar Bhawan,

Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,

New Delhi – 110 023

Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Appeal for Action – Kerala – Threats and hate calls to Dr. M M Basheer, a reputed literary critic and retired Calicut University professor of Malayalam in Kozhikode district of Kerala by a right wing Hindu fundamentalist group - Regarding

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a Forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavors to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are now writing to express our grave concern regarding the repeated threats and hate calls being made to Dr. M M Basheer, former professor of Malayalam at the University of Calicut and well known Malayalam literary critic for writing a series of newspaper columns on the ancient Indian epic “Ramayana” in the Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi. Dr. M M Basheer is the prime target of a concerted hate campaign by the saffron outfits aimed to threaten, harass and intimidate litterateurs, artists and authors holding and expressing critical views on religious and cultural matters. Dr. M M Basheer is one of those writers in Malayalam who has specifically been singled out on the basis of his religious identity, faith or allegiance in Kerala.

Source of Information on the Incident:

The Regional Coordinator of HRDA for South of India

Media Reports

Status of the Human Rights Defenders:

Dr. M M. Basheer is a retired professor of Malayalam at the University of Calicut, Kerala. He is known as a writer, scholar and a renowned Malayalam literary critic. He has written more than 40 critical works on Malayalam poetry, short story and novel. Dr. M M Basheer has been associated with the modernist movement in Malayalam literature. His doctoral work on Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan is widely considered one of the most authoritative works on the subject. In 2008, the Kerala Sahitya Academy published his work on short story titled Malayala Cherukatha Sahitya Charithram (History of Malayalam Short Story) in two volumes. His columns for Malayalam newspapers have been on a range of subjects including the Quran, Sree Narayana Guru, and the Ramayana.

The Perpetrators:

Unknown callers allegedly belong to a Hindu fundamentalist group called “Hanuman Sena”

Date of Incident:

September 4, 2015

Place of Incident:

The propagators have been calling on his phone.

Incident detail:

According to sources Dr. M M Basheer, a 75-year-old Malayalam literary critic promised to write six newspaper columns in a series on Ramayana in the Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi in August, 2015. Dr. M M Basheer was forced to stop writing his sixth contributory columns after he faced a sustained malicious campaign against him on the telephone by unnamed persons. The unknown callers rebuked him for writing about Hindu god Rama while being a Muslim.

On August 3rd 2015 Basheer’s first column, titled ‘Sri Rama’s Anger’ appeared in the Malayalam Mathrubhoomi. Soon after its publication he and the newspaper’s editors started receiving a barrage of abusive calls every day. Four days later, after the fifth column was published, Basheer called off the series. The series he wrote was on

Valmiki Ramayana. Valmiki depicts Rama with human characteristics and does not shy away from criticising his actions. The callers were taking exception to the poet's criticism of Rama, which was given in quotes and they would ask Dr. Basheer what right he had to criticise Lord Rama. Most of the callers would not hear his explanation but just abuse him. The five Ramayana pieces he wrote for Mathrubhumi this year looked at Valmiki's critique of Rama's call to Sita to undertake the "agnipariksha". The articles were more about the brilliance of Valmiki, the poet, and the insights he offers while writing about the human condition.

According to sources, a fringe Hindutva outfit Hanuman Sena (army) has put up the posters near the newspaper's head office in Kozhikode charging it for offending the sentiments of a particular community. Although Dr. Basheer's column had nothing to "offend" in the writing, even then the Hindu outfit Hanuman Sena had been invoking religion to harass and intimidate him to stop expressing freely his views.

Sources in Mathrubhumi news paper also confirmed that many abusive calls (callers didn't disclose their names, nor the name of organisation) received by the newspaper's editorial desk asking why the newspaper had permitted a Muslim to write on the Ramayana. Local newspapers have run popular columns on Ramayana through the Malayalam month of Karkkidakam, which falls in July-August, observed as the "Ramayana month". Apart from Dr. M M Basheer, other well-known writers in Kerala such as critic Thomas Mathew, poet and popular lyricist, late Yusuf Ali Kecheri, and poet and teacher, Veerankutty, had contributed their columns in the past.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that the Superintendent of Police, District Collector and District Magistrate of Kozhikode District:

- Orders an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of abusive calls and threats being made to target the human rights defender –Dr. M M Basheer;
- Take immediate legal action on the perpetrators, unknown in the case, for issuing threats, by arresting them after identification and using all provisions of law to ensure that Dr. M M Basheer's physical safety is ensured;

- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Dr. M M Basheer who is still under risk of further reprisals from the perpetrators and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently;
- Ensure provision of compensation, apology to Dr. M M Basheer for the psychological sufferings he has undergone because of threats to his life and liberty;
- Along with local district officials puts an end to all acts of attack and harassment against all human rights defenders in general in the state of Kerala to ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as defenders of human rights without any hindrances;
- Takes steps to conform to the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially:
 - Article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels;
 - Article 12.2, which provides that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the SHRC in Kerala to also take necessary steps to establish a state focal point for HRDs in order to ensure that HRDs have a new protection mechanism in their own state;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the SHRC in Kerala to convene meetings of all state human rights institutions in the state [women, minorities, right to information, disability, children etc] to ensure that a coordinated strategy is developed within the State of Kerala for the protection of the rights of human rights defenders;

- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Kerala in collaboration with the NHRC Focal Point on HRDs and the SHRC Kerala to provide sensitization training to law enforcement and security forces on the role and activities of human rights defenders as a matter of priority, with technical advice and assistance from relevant United Nations entities, NGOs and other partners;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Kerala in collaboration with the SHRC, Kerala to publicly acknowledge the importance and legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders, i.e. anyone who, “individually and in association with others, ... promote[s] and ... strive[s] for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (Art.1 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders);
- More generally, ensures in all circumstances the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with international human rights instruments ratified by India is strictly adhered to in the state of Kerala.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)

Honorary National Working Secretary