



## Human Rights Defenders Alert – India

National Coordination Office

No. 6 Vallabai Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai-625002, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91-9994368540 Email:hrda.india@gmail.com

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October 26, 2015

**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 – Karnataka: Brutal attack and threats to cut off fingers of a young Dalit writer and activist of Bahujan Vidyarthi Sanghatane (BVS) Mr. Huchangi Prasad in Davangere in Karnataka - Regarding**

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours 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 brutal attack with threats to cut off fingers of young Dalit writer and activist of Bahujan Vidyarthi Sanghatane, Mr. Huchangi Prasad in Davangere in Karnataka by unknown assailants allegedly from a right wing group. Mr. Huchangi Prasad was targeted for his critical views against the caste system and Hinduism carried in his book "Odala Kichhu" in Kannada which was released a few months ago. The brutal physical assault on Mr. Huchangi Prasad is the latest instance of a violent hate campaign in the state of Karnataka aimed to stifle free speech.

**Source of Information on the Incident:**

- Media Reports.
- A communication with HRD, Mr. Huchangi Prasad.

- The Regional Coordinator of HRDA for South of India.

### **Status of the Human Rights Defenders:**

Mr. Huchangi Prasad is a 23-year-old, 2<sup>nd</sup> year journalism student at Davangere University in Karnataka. He is also associated with Bahujan Vidyarthi Sanghatane (BVS) in Davangere in Central Karnataka. He comes from a small village Santebennur in Davangere district where his parents still work as daily wage labour. Huchangi Prasad was not sent to school, and was made to go into bonded labour at an early age and has seen and faced caste discrimination and the violence around it. It was only when he was rescued and put into Chinnara Angala (school for rescued children) that he received proper education. Therefore his writings reflect this pain of the caste system. He wrote his book in Kannada "Odala Kichhu" (Inner Fire – a reference to the will and determination of the Dalit community) in April 2014. The book, a collection of essays and poems largely depicted the instances of Dalit ill-treatment and the pains he himself had experienced as a Dalit. The book was released by Kannada writer K.S. Bhagwan, who has recently received threats from the right wing groups. Mr. Huchangi Prasad had been receiving threats for nearly a month after the release of his book.

### **The Perpetrators:**

1. Eight Unknown assistants

### **Date of Incident:**

October 21, 2015

### **Incident detail:**

According to sources on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015, Thursday, at around 11.30 PM, 23-year-old, Mr. Huchangi Prasad, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student of Masters in Journalism at Davangere University, Karnataka and a young student Dalit writer, activist of BVS was brutally attacked by a group of unidentified persons in Davangere in Central Karnataka.

According to the complaint filed by Mr. Huchangi Prasad, an unidentified man came to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe hostel at the university in the early hours, where he lives claiming that Mr. Prasad's mother had been hospitalised following a heart attack. Apparently in "shock", Huchangi Prasad followed the man

who promised to take him to the hospital. Midway, in an isolated corner of APMC Yard, suddenly a group of eight to ten people ambushed him.

They surrounded him and started to push him around and said that his writings were anti- Hindu as he talked about the caste system. One of them smeared kumkum (vermilion powder) all over his face and then the rest started hitting him. Even as they were hitting, they kept threatening him to stop writing critical views about Hindus. They said he had sinned in his previous birth and that's why he was born a Dalit. The group seemed to know him and the WhatsApp messages that he had sent about the recent Dalit killings.

The group pulled out a knife and said they will cut his fingers off so that he can never write again. They threatened to chop off his hands to stop him from writing anything against caste system as they were about to cut his fingers, he managed to push one of them, but got slashed from the knife on his right palm and then he knew he had to somehow escape. Mr. Huchangi Prasad then pushed his way through the group and ran into the nearby woods, where he hid. Hours later, around 1 AM when he was sure that the group had left, he came out and took the help of an approaching two wheeler. The person on the two -wheeler then dropped him at the private hospital.

He then informed his friends at the hostel who later came to the hospital and he then later checked with his mother of her situation and found that she was fine. He was treated for injuries and went back to the hostel. Mr. Huchangi Prasad filed a police complaint at the RMC police station. The police have registered a case against "unknown persons" under attempt to murder (IPC 307) and under sections of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Mr. Huchangi Prasad is still recovering, and has asked the police to provide him protection. The attack comes barely three months after the shooting of writer M.M. Kalburgi – barely 100 km away – and at a time when numerous writers across the country have raised their voice against rising intolerance.

**Appeal:**

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps and undertake independent investigation and to also ensure that the Commissioner of Police, the District Collector and District Magistrate of Davangere District:

- Order an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of brutal attack and targeting of the human rights defender Mr. Huchangi Prasad;
- Take immediate action on the perpetrators, in this case unknown assailants who should be searched and apprehended through a nationwide alert with all those functioning behind them;
- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of the family members of Mr. Huchangi Prasad who are 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 reparation, compensation, apology to the family of the defender for the psychological sufferings they are undergoing because of the constant threats and attack on Mr. Huchangi Prasad;
- Put an end to all acts of attack and harassment and killing against all human rights defenders like Mr. Huchangi Prasad in the State of Karnataka and ensure that in all circumstances they carry out their activities as writers and 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 Karnataka 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 Karnataka to convene a meeting 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 Karnataka for the protection of the rights of human rights defenders;
- Recommend urgently and speedily during the pendency of this complaint, the State Government of Karnataka in collaboration with the NHRC Focal Point on HRDs and the SHRC Karnataka 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 Karnataka in collaboration with the SHRC, Karnataka 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 Karnataka.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard, Yours sincerely,



**(Henri Tiphagne)**

Honorary National Working Secretary