

Why Tamil Nadu DGP's 'human rights' order is drawing criticism

The October 21 directive warns of action against private organisations if they use the words 'human rights' in their name or display them on vehicles.

N Vinoth Kumar

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Tamil Nadu DGP C Sylendra Babu has drawn the ire of human rights organisations over his October 21 order warning of legal action against private organisations if they use the words "human rights" in their name or display them on vehicles.

While the DGP's order has stemmed from the police getting complaints about private organisations adding the words "human rights" to their names and identifying themselves as associated with national and state human rights commissions, many genuine organisations working towards human rights are angry about the circular, which orders action against outfits which have not removed the said wordings.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in New Delhi and the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission (NHRC) already work to protect human rights and to make recommendations to the government in case of rights violations. Besides these governmental organisations, many non-governmental organisations across India are also working towards safeguarding human rights. Most such organisations use the words "human rights" in their name.

The NHRC had in 2009 issued an order directing private organisations to remove the said wording because some outfits were misusing the term "human rights" and indulging in misdemeanours. Taking lead, the SHRC also came out with a similar order.

Based on the order, an amendment was made in 2010, under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975, which pushed the organisations to remove the words from their name within six months.

But many of them did not act on the directive and cases pertaining to such usage of words in an organisation's name have flooded the Madras High Court.

It is in this backdrop that the DGP issued the recent order to the state police department.

Anger due to DGP's record

Many rights organisations and common people have taken offence to the DGP's order also because of his own troublesome record.

A 1987-batch IPS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre, he has been linked to an alleged encounter in 2010 at Coimbatore in which a child murder convict, Mohanraj, was killed, as well as a more recent encounter in Sriperumbudur.

S Balamurugan, a Coimbatore-based advocate and member of People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) said the police have no power to send out such orders. "The DGP could have reiterated the order passed earlier by the SHRC. Other than that, he cannot send out an order on his own. Instead of issuing such circulars, he must look into police reforms," he said.

VA Ramesh Nathan, convener of National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, said the police should promote human rights instead of curtailing them. "We are witnessing many police excesses. But because of that we are not saying that we don't want the police. Similarly, if any organisation is found abusing the words 'human rights', let the police take action on the organisation concerned than have a blanket ban," he said.

It is to be noted that the Protection of Human Rights Act was enacted in India only in 1993, and the NHRC and SHRCs were established. According to United Nations conventions, the concept of "human rights" keeps expanding to include women's rights, child rights, labour rights, environmental rights, etc. So every individual has the freedom to raise their voice for human rights, Nathan explained.

According to him, the state DMK government and the BJP government at the Centre are showing fear over human rights. "The Tamil Nadu DGP is being projected as a

progressive police officer, but in reality these kind of actions are regressive in nature,” he said.

Henri Tiphagne, well-known human rights activist and honorary national working secretary, Human Rights Defenders Alert-India, said that the NHRC and SHRC have done “a bad thing with good intention”.

“We are not against the initiation of any criminal action under the normal criminal law, provided there is evidence of cheating and evidence of any other criminal act that any individual or association of human rights defenders has got engaged in. It is the right of human rights defenders to also constitute an association that remains unregistered as long as they function within the parameters of law,” he said.

The Federal tried to get a comment from the DGP, who took charge in June this year, but he has not responded yet.

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