

A new Dalit militant movement in Kerala

A new militant Dalit outfit called Dalit Human Rights Movement (DHRM) has suddenly become active in Kerala. Seven activists, including K.Dasan and Ad. Asokan, of this organization have been arrested by the Kerala police in connection with the murder of one Shiva Prasad (68), a resident of Varkala on 23d. September, 2009. Shiva Prasad was hacked to death at Varkala-Ayirur road by three assailants who came on a motorbike with heavy machetes concealed under their rain coats. In the same morning, they had also attacked another person by name Ashokan (48), a teashop owner, in a similar manner. However he survived the attack. Enquiries in this regard have revealed that trouble had been brewing up in the area since Chadaya Dinam celebrations this year. Chadaya Dinam is the birth anniversary of Sri Narayana Guru, who was one of the greatest thinkers and social reformers of India in the 20th. century. However he has now been reduced to an apostle of only the Ezhava community (BC) in Kerala after Ezhavas started worshipping him as a God. On the eve of Chadaya Dinam celebrations this year, there was an altercation between the festival organizers and some local Dalit youths of Varkala, who when approached for some contributions for the festivities, reportedly abused the Ezhavas and their reformist saint Sree Narayana Guru. Though the matter ended without further trouble, a few days later a statue of Sree Narayana Guru erected at Chavadi Mukku, near Varkala was found beheaded, probably as a retaliatory action by some Dalits. The attack on Shiva Prasad and Ashokan also appears to be a retaliatory action by some misguided DHRM supporters against the upper caste Hindus. It was also a demonstration of Dalit power under the banner of Dalit Human Rights Movement and their capacity to terrorise their erstwhile tormentors.

The DHRM is a pro-Dalit organization which was formed about two years back. It was registered as a charitable society at North Paravoor (Ernakulam district) in December, 2007. It has reportedly been formed with the following main objectives.

- 1) To protect the rights of socially vulnerable Dalit and Tribal communities.
- 2) To keep the Dalits and Adivasis away from drugs and alcohol.
- 3) To promote social and legal awareness among their supporters.

One V.V.Selvaraj (27) of North Paravoor is the Chairman of the DHRM and K.A.Rajeev is its State Secretary. K. Das, a native of Attingal (Trivandrum) and coordinator of the organization, heads its operations in South Kerala, where as one Shaji leads its operations in North Kerala. Ad. Ashokan of Kollam is the legal adviser of the outfit.

The DHRM is reported to have a well-knit and well-disciplined cadre force. Blue trousers and black shirts are the prescribed uniform for its cadres. It also has a strict code of conduct and its members are not allowed to consume liquor or narcotic drugs. Its cadres even fight against drug mafias in Dalit colonies. The outfit is reported to have many pockets of influence in the state, mainly in southern districts like Trivandrum, Kollam and Ernakulam.

The DHRM leaders conduct regular meetings and study classes in Dalit colonies during the night time on every Sunday. The instructors who conduct the classes at these sessions are generally outsiders. They tell the DHRM cadres that though the country got independence in 1947, real independence is still elusive to vast sections of Dalits and other marginalized sections of people in India as they are still kept under oppressive and slave-like conditions by the rich upper caste landlords, money lenders and businessmen in connivance with the ruling regimes in the country. Narrating the centuries-old injustice suffered by their ancestors, they explain to them as to how the lands of their ancestors were cunningly and stealthily taken over by the upper caste landlords for defaulting timely repayment of loans, etc. and how they were forced to work like slaves on their on land and how their wives and daughters were sexually exploited by their Hindu landlords. They tell them as to how under the prevailing exploitative system dominated by the upper caste Hindus and their patrons in power, they can never expect to get any justice from the ruling class unless they stand united and challenge the system and fight back their tormentors. They tell them that the properties, lands and agricultural income that the upper-caste people enjoy today are the results of the hard labour put in by their ancestors and hence the Dalits must also get a fair share of all such properties and income. They tell them that the time has come to take revenge against upper-caste Hindus for all the crimes, injustice and atrocities that they had committed against the Dalits in the past. They further call upon the DHRM cadres and supporters not to shy away from the path of violence and terror and exhort them to retaliate against their upper class tormentors in every possible way. They also encourage young Dalit activists to plant their seeds in the upper caste wombs.

The DHRM instructors further tell the Dalit activists that Hinduism was never a part of their religion as their ancestors who worshipped sun, fire and mountains had their own customs and traditions. They brief them that the Hinduism is something that was imposed on them by their Hindu tormentors who came as migrants and with their money and muscle power took over the land of Dalits, the original inhabitants of this country and used them as their slaves. They ask them how the Dalits who have been subjected to all kinds of atrocities and injustice for thousands of years, who were denied entry into temples and who, being dubbed as untouchables, were not even allowed to come in close proximity of upper-caste Hindus, can be a part of Hinduism. Then they exhort the Dalit activists to shun all symbols of Hindu identity and Hindu religious practices and traditions for ever and ask them instead to adopt their ancient tribal customs in conducting social events like marriages, funerals and other such personal and community ceremonies. The provocative and inflammatory speeches made by the instructors at DHRM meetings came to be known when a CPM leader of Trivandrum, on hearing such secret meetings in Dalit colonies, engaged a Dalit youth to record the proceedings of one such meeting using a mobile phone.

The DHRM is also found to be advocating self-rule in Dalit colonies by asking its supporters not to take their disputes and quarrels to the courts and police and instead approach the organisation to settle all such cases.

The Dalit militancy is a new phenomenon in Kerala. The word Dalit itself was not in common use in Kerala in the past. The DHRM certainly is being encouraged by some outside forces. From the nature, style and contents of the anti-Hindu speeches made by the DHRM instructors at their secret meetings, it can easily be identified that prominent Christian NGO activist Pradeep Prabhu, presently based in Hyderabad, is the mastermind behind the DHRM, the new militant Dalit movement in Kerala. Prabhu and his associates have floated hundreds of such organisations in Dalit and Adivasi localities in different parts of the country, where also, in their meetings similar extremely provocative anti-Hindu speeches are routinely made with the aim of weaning the Dalits and Adivasis away from Hinduism and ultimately to convert them into Christianity. It is suspected that the Dalit Human Rights Movement (DHRM) of Kerala is linked with the Dalit Human Rights Monitoring (DHRM) of Tamil Nadu, headed By Ruth Manorama, a Dalit Christian leader and winner of Right Livelihood Award for 2006.

The Dalit Human Rights Monitoring (DHRM) was founded in Tamil Nadu in 2002 as a watch-dog agency to monitor the atrocities against the Dalits in India and to intervene legally against human rights violations against Dalits. The first convention of the DHRM was held at Madurai in Tamil Nadu in March 2003. It has units in 12 states, including Kerala. The DHRM has an eight-member National Advisory Committee with Ruth Manorama as the Convener. Other members of the committee include Paul Divakar, Martin Mcwan, Vincent, Manoharan, P.L.Mimroth, Mrs.Vimal Thorat and Henri Tiphangne, who are all closely linked with Pradeep Prabhu.

People's Watch and Dalit Foundation also two pro-Dalit NGOs closely linked with the DHRM. The affairs of the Dalit Foundation are managed by a 7-member Trust, as per details given below.

Gagan Sethi, Gujarat---Chairman.

Martin Macwan, Gujarat—Member

Dr.Syeda Hamid-----Member, NAC

Dr. Ruth Manorama-----President, National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO) and Convener, National Advisory Committee of DHRM.

Henri Tiphangne-----Executive Director, People's Watch.

Mrs. Mary Thekkekara-----Journalist.

Mrs. Kamala Bhasin-----Human Rights activist.