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● Human Rights

# Activists question role of SHRC

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By M Aruloli  
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THE failure of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to take notice on the increasing incidences of human rights violations in the State has brought into question, the role of the SHRC. There are reports everyday about human rights violations, but though the SHRC is empowered to take suo motu notice of these events and take action, it does not seem to have done so.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was constituted under

an Act of Parliament to check human rights violations, inquire into complaints and provide relief to the victims and recommending action against the perpetrators. In order to make the human rights machinery more effective, SHRCs were created.

Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission was constituted in Dec 1995. It had statutory powers of a civil court and suo motu power to take action on its own without waiting for formal complaint by individuals or organisations, taking note of reports in dailies and journals.

However, the SHRC has been

blamed by human rights activists for its poor response even to complaints addressed to it. Around 200 cases said to be reported to the SHRC during the last five years, it has disposed of only 6 to 7 percent of them with some orders. These, according to Jevan Kumar, convenor of the Campaign Against Torture, Thoothukudi, do not include any case taken suo motu notice taken by the Commission.

Speaking to TNIE, the executive director of one of the leading human rights organisations in the State, People's Watch, Henry Tiphagne said that among the 144 cases they filed

with the SHRC since 2000, compensation for the victims and disciplinary action against the perpetrators were recommended only in 5 cases. However, in none of the cases did the SHRC recommend prosecution of the violators, he added.

Tiphagne also said that there were cases that were pending even after more than 8 reminders sent to the SHRC.

Dalit activist Barathan, of 'Manitha Urimai Kalam', Tirunelveli, came down heavily upon the SHRC for its indifferent attitude towards the widely reported murder of the

Dalit president of the Nakkalaimuthanpatti, near Sankarankoil, about 6 months ago.

Another grievance of the human rights activists is that the functioning of the SHRC was not transparent. One can find nothing in their website but just an article by one of the former police officers and excerpts of the Human Rights Protection Act. Even it has not yet been updated (as on April 10, 2008) as Justice Thangaraj's name figures as the chairperson of the SHRC instead of the newly appointed A S Venkatachalamurthy.