

India: In Haryana, Human Rights Commission is Memberless While Cow Protection Panel Has 16 Members

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Thanks to the Khattar government's priorities, the Human Rights Commission has come to a virtual standstill while the "Gau Seva" (cow protection panel) flourishes.

New Delhi: Nearly five-and-a-half years after it was constituted during the Congress-led Bhupinder Singh Hooda regime, work in the Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) has virtually come to a standstill.

Under the Manohar Lal Khattar-led BJP government in the state, the post of the HHRC chairperson has been lying vacant for the last 19 months and the posts of the two other members on the panel have also not been filled for the past five months. As a consequence, the pendency of cases has been rising. As of the last count, pendency at the panel stood at 2,205 cases, queries filed under the Right to Information Act have revealed.

Haryana appointed 16-member gau sewa panel

The information in the matter was obtained by Samalkha-based RTI activist and Jan Abhiyan Manch member P.P. Kapoor through a petition filed on January 12. The RTI response reveals that one more human rights commission has fallen prey to the criminal neglect of a state government, he said.

"The fact that key posts in the commission are lying vacant while the Haryana government has filled all 16 posts in the state Gau Seva Aayog (commission for welfare of bovines) clearly indicates how insensitive the Khattar government is towards human rights," he said, adding that "it also reflects on the fact that the priority of this government is not the welfare of human beings."

Having filed the RTI appeals after the post of chairperson had fallen vacant, Kapoor said he learnt that while 2,205 cases were pending with the commission, no decision could be taken on them. Of these, he said nearly 800 complaints had been received in the last five months alone. Apart from the key posts of chair and members, 34 of the 83 other sanctioned posts were also lying vacant.

Among the other posts that have not been filled up are those of two registrars, one of a joint registrar, one of an assistant registrar and two of special secretary. He said all these were important positions for the functioning of a state human rights commission.

Budget of commission increased, but work is stalled

Kapoor said that when the HHRC was formed in September 2012, its annual budget was Rs 2.5 crore but this was gradually scaled up and reached Rs 6.5 crore for 2017-18. However, he lamented that with the posts of the chairperson and two members lying vacant, the funds would end up getting wasted. As such, the activist has urged the president of India and the National Human Rights

Commission to intervene in the matter and restore normalcy in the functioning of the panel.

The petition had pointed out how former chief justice of the Punjab and Haryana high court, Vijendra Jain, was the last chairperson of the state human rights commission. Since his demitting office on August 1, 2016, the post has not been filled up.

The last two members of the commission were Justice H.S. Bhalla and retired Indian Administrative Service officer J.S. Ahlawat. After these two officers superannuated on September 20, 2017, the government did not act promptly to fill these either.

‘Rights of minorities, Dalits, women trampled in state’

On why the filling of these posts was important for the state, Kapoor said Haryana has regularly witnessed a large number of cases of atrocities against Dalits, minorities, women and the weaker sections of the society and many of the complainants came from these groups.

Apart from this, the rights activists said that during the rule of the current BJP government in the state, nearly 90 people have been killed by the police or other security forces in various incidents of violence including those that took place during the Jat reservation agitation, the Dera Sacha Sauda episode or the Rampal ashram siege.

Stating that Haryana has witnessed a large number of cases of human rights violations in the last three year, Kapoor said the absence of a functioning commission is being felt all the more because there had been numerous instances of loot, arson and violence during the Jat agitation which had destroyed the livelihoods of a large number of people.

Likewise, he said, the over three-crore population of the state has been deprived of a key platform to lodge its complaints against human rights violations. “It is as if there is no one left to listen to their grievances,” he said, accusing the Khattar government of reducing the commission to a toothless body.

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar

P.S.

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