

PEOPLE’S MANIFESTO

Adivasis and Dalits of Kandhamal speak out!

Foreword

Political parties across the spectrum are gearing up to woo the voters with populist promises. But, for the citizens of Orissa this is not, yet another routine election. The unprecedented carnage played out in Kandhamal, spreading to many districts like Gajapati, Rayagada, Boudh, Bargarh, Bolangir, Koraput and Jajpur in Orissa, raise many questions among all. It is mind boggling to note that the state has not still contained the violence and it continues unabated even after seven months. Never in history had such protracted massive attack on humanity taken place in India.

With Kandhamal carnage as the backdrop, a blot on the secular democratic ethos of our country, it is time for those of us committed to build a secular democratic India to ensure that the issues and the demands of the Adivasis, Dalits and other marginalized people are brought to the forefront before the electorate and political parties. As concerned citizens of India we reinforce our faith in the Constitutional values, namely, to build India into a sovereign, social, secular, democratic, republic, assuring to all citizens of India equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. After a few rounds of discussions and with a day long deliberation on 26 March 2009, at CYSD Bhubaneswar, based on the present scenario of Kandhamal this **People’s Manifesto – Adivasis and Dalits of Kandhamal speak out** was evolved. All organizations who have participated in the deliberations and endorsed this manifesto, along with Adivasis and Dalits of Kandhamal, the secular democratic groups, women’s movements, Adivasi and Dalit organizations, civil society groups realize the need to engage in expanding democratic space to protect and promote the dignity and humanity of the Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalized communities in Kandhamal.

We affirm our faith in the parliamentary democracy, which holds every citizen of Orissa - especially the elected representatives and the administration - responsible and accountable for the Kandhamal scenario. The people’s manifesto is an attempt to articulate the demands of the people of Kandhamal. These demands are not exhaustive but only indicate the basic requirements to live as dignified citizens in Kandhamal, Orissa. We appeal to every political party and every candidate to assure that the demands enumerated here below would be addressed and fulfilled.

Civil Society Organizations of Orissa and

Adivasis and Dalits of Kandhamal

PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO

Adivasis and Dalits of Kandhamal speak out!

The unprecedented communal violence that gripped Kandhamal and other parts of Orissa in the recent past, and continues in different forms even today, is a blot on the secular, democratic, pluralist ethos of India. After the killing of VHP leader Laxmanananda on 23rd Aug 2008 by the Maoists, the mayhem engineered in Kandhamal is not only the most horrendous episode in the post-independent India, but also a typical one that can be likened to what the Taliban has been doing in the Swat valley of Afghanistan. Ironically enough, while the State government, based on evidence, blamed the Maoists for the said killing, a fact which was repeatedly corroborated too by the Maoists themselves, the State machinery however allowed the reign of terror unleashed by the miscreants led by *Sangh Parivar* on the false pretext that the Christians were behind this killing.

Were a CBI enquiry instituted at an appropriate time to investigate into the murder of Laxmanananda as demanded by various Christian organizations, a section of political leaders and civil society groups across the country, the bare truth and the whole truth would have come to light of the day and the blame game that followed and the consequent serial violence solely targeted against the Christians and Dalits in Kandhamal and outside for months at a stretch would have been averted. It is still a great mystery, why both parties of Orissa's ruling coalition BJD and BJP along with the entire crop of *Sangh Parivar* deadly opposed the proposal of handing over the Laxmanananda murder case to CBI.

To further stoke the communal fire, another myth invented earlier by the *Sangh Parivar* i.e. the so-called ethnic divide between the '*Hindu Adivasis*' and '*Pano Christians*' was overnight blown out of proportion and drilled through a well orchestrated media hype, into the people's mind across the country. In fact, the notorious Goebellian strategy against Jews of Nazi Germany- give the dog a bad name and kill it- found its re-enactment in Kandhamal on a fuller scale and with better sophistication and greater precision.

What followed as a result is simply catastrophic, difficult to capture in words and unparalleled in scale of ruthlessness and barbarism. Only the sensible people of Kandhamal and of course the masterminds and miscreants know what actually happened in Kandhamal, and where and how. With the mainstream media remaining tight-lipped, State machinery playing the role of a super censor and major political parties joining in the bandwagon of communalist *hindutva* bogey, what has trickled down to the public knowledge about Kandhamal tragedy through the press or otherwise is just a tip of the iceberg. The persons belonging to minorities, Dalits and Adivasis were massacred, women molested and raped, thousands of houses burnt, valuables looted, crops and cattle stolen away, Churches and prayer halls desecrated and demolished. Hundreds of public and philanthropic institutions, be they schools, orphanages, old age homes, leprosy homes, dispensaries, TB sanatoriums or NGO establishments were also looted, razed to

the ground or burnt away. To cap it all, the manner in which Sister Meena was gang raped and then paraded naked along with a senior citizen Father Chellan on the streets of K. Nuagaon and the manner in which a Hindu Dalit girl Rajani Majhi was flamed into death at Padmapur in Bargarh district, all in broad daylight and in the presence of policemen, are in fact glaring instances of 'national shame' as admitted subsequently by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh before a galaxy of heads of States in Paris.

No doubt Kandhamal ranks lowest in terms of human development indices like per capita income, literacy, health, infant and maternal mortality rate or development of agriculture or industry. Needless to reiterate, this is the cumulative effect of decades of lopsided development, mal-governance, breakdown of law and order and anti-poor orientation of the officialdom in charge of implementing the policies and laws of the State and Centre. Besides, Kandhamal having several 5th Schedule Areas, its administration should have been governed directly by the Governor himself in consultation with State Tribal Advisory Council on one hand and in accordance with the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 on the other. However, Kandhamal did not receive an iota of positive discrimination that it deserved as per the mandate of Constitution and PESA. Admittedly there are of course also some such pockets of abject poverty and chronic backwardness in other parts of the State and country.

But the question arises, does communal violence flare up at intervals in those areas? Why then Kandhamal, and more so its Christian minority comprising both Dalits and Adivasis along with Hindu Dalits have been subjected to communal violence intermittently? The precise answer to this all important question can be succinctly worded thus: the ruling coalition of the State, of which the *hindutva* party BJP was a partner, having utterly failed to deliver a modicum of genuine development or good governance have been pursuing all the while the notorious policy of 'divide and rule' using the spurious grounds of religion, caste and ethnicity. If the common, poor people are kept constantly engaged in fratricidal war between themselves around exclusionary and divisive planks like religion or caste or ethnicity, they can not put up a common fight against the common problems like poverty, hunger and backwardness. Thus the political strategy in Kandhamal of the 11 year old ruling coalition of the State with the Centre allowed it to materialize by way of a studied silence or planned connivance.

So far the recent communal mayhem was concerned; it is the junior partner of ruling coalition, BJP which systematically executed the pogrom at ground level through its militant *hindutva* networks while it was left to the major partner BJD to provide the needed security and protection cover at the administrative level to the perpetrators. It was no wonder, the very ring leaders who were arrested and jailed by the police under the mounting pressure of public opinion were bailed out group after group only to carry out a fresh series of kidnap and murder across Kandhamal. It is an open secret that both the police and the public prosecutors assisted the rioters who were accused of non-bailable offenses like murder, arson and loot to get away with the bail from the courts.

The very basic principles enunciated in the Constitution like freedom of conscience and freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion were thrown to the wind by these

vested interests. A bogey was raised around religion and ‘conversion’ to polarize the integrated community of Adivasis and Dalits to successfully carry out the predetermined genocide. Further, to justify the genocide a grand myth was made to spin around far and wide by sectarian forces in unison that Dalits and particularly Christian Dalits have usurped the privileges given under law to the Adivasis through deceitful appropriation of land of Adivasis and jobs reserved for them by using fake certificates.

However, the plain truth is that Dalits including Christians of Kandhamal are still by and large landless and live off as agricultural wage labourers or petty job holders such as *Anganwadi Worker*, *Asha Worker*, Non-formal teacher, NGO worker or service personnel in philanthropic institutions like Orphanage, Leprosy Home, Old Age Home and the like. The real truth, which so far remains unacknowledged in official literature and mainstream media alike is that a sizable number of outsiders who migrated from coastal districts and other places and settled all over Kandhamal as traders, contractors or political leaders over decades, grew into a class of exploiters and sought, for obvious reasons, to carve out a stable and strong position for themselves in the socio-political profile of Kandhamal. They systematically cultivated and built up close rapport with the Government officials, most of whom did also hail from coastal plains.

It is a common knowledge that the traders belonging to this class used to flatten their coffers by cheating innocent *Kandhas* (STs) by every possible means, such as paying paltry sums against their cash crops like high quality ginger and turmeric, and even manipulation in weight and measure. However, thanks to spread of education and awareness among the Adivasis, made possible due to educational programmes run by NGOs and Christian missionaries, the exploitative section of traders found the future prospects for their fabulous gains threatened by the rising tribal consciousness. Sensing that the Christian community was responsible for spread of such awareness and education among the Adivasis who had largely remained outside the ken of modern knowledge for centuries, the profit seeking class of traders targeted them as their enemy number one. They were also in search of an agency, which would protect them from threat of any kind and also an ideology with the help of which they could instigate the Adivasis against both the Christians and the Dalits. And they got both handy, *Sangh Parivar* as the organizational agency and their anti-minority and anti-Dalit brand of Hindutva as the ideological credo. Just an alibi was wanted before they could embark upon a well-orchestrated drive for total annihilation against Christians and Dalits. And alas ! it was precisely served by the murder of Laxmanananda and his colleagues at Jalespeta Ashram on 23rd of Aug. 2008 by the Maoists.

Indeed the entire mayhem was a well-designed ploy of the *Sangh Parivar* to eliminate both the Dalits and Adivasis of Kandhamal beyond religion to usher in the fascist ideology of ‘one nation, one culture, one people’, to reestablish manuvada and reinstate religio-cultural hegemony promoting ‘unity in uniformity’ at the cost of ‘unity in diversity’, the long cherished ethos of our nation.

There was a calculated effort to replicate the Kandhamal like carnage across Orissa and sadly enough the mass media operative in the State, print and electronic, completely

oblivious of their obligation under the Code of Journalistic Conduct mandated by the Press Council of India behaved in such a way as to aid and abet the evil designs of the saffron brigade. That both State Government and Sangh Parivar were keen to gag the free voice of independent intelligentsia on Kandhamal issue by all means has been clearly borne out by the sudden arrest and imprisonment of Sri Lenin Kumar and his printer colleague along with bulk seizure of his 'controversial' book on Kandhamal. When such action of police was challenged in the court of law and as well before Orissa Human Rights Cell, it came to public knowledge that the said book entitled 'River of Blood flowing in Kandhamal in the name of Religion' published by Nishan had nothing that could held 'objectionable' in the eyes of law but carried a detailed theoretical and factual exposition of the role of RSS, the mother organization of *Sangh Parivar* behind Kandhamal mayhem.

Besides it was noticed, the political parties within and outside the legislature, and also in their public discourse seemed to have surrendered their conscience before the very forces who were openly disavowing the foundational principles of our secular, democratic pluralist polity. BJP, the political arm of RSS along with its sister outfits like *Bajrang Dal*, *VHP*, *Durga Vahini*, *Hindu Jagran Samukhya* were found to be often instigating and manning the pogrom and as such they have no justification to exist and operate as legal entities within the framework of our Constitution.

It has been established beyond any shade of doubt, the anti-minority, anti-Adivasi, anti-Dalit and anti-women mayhem that unfolded in the recent past all across Kandhamal is the well crafted handiwork of an alliance of vested interests led by the *hindutva* brigade, the real mastermind, their collaborators being the exploitative traders and corrupt and gullible section of Government officials. It is agonizing to say that the bizarre hate campaign carried forward by them along communal lines had succeeded, temporarily though, in fracturing the invaluable centuries old emotional bond that existed between the Adivasis and Dalits, as epitomized through *Kui*, a typical Kandhamal brand of composite culture. Although such a sad state of affairs runs detrimental to the interest of every average man or woman of Kandhamal, be they Christians or Hindus, Adivasis or Dalits, the vested interests of all hues and colours stand to gain by it and therefore perpetuate it by hook or crook. And that is precisely the challenge before the common people of Kandhamal today - whether to allow the artificially injected process of polarization any further or to work towards rebuilding of the composite heritage of Kandhamal?

Looking at the issue from a national perspective, after Gujarat and now Kandhamal the *hindutva* forces have succeeded to some extent in their attempt to polarize the pluralist matrix of our republic as evident from Varun Gandhi episode. The man who dared say that Muslims and Sikhs are anti-nationals had been fielded by the BJP, in open defiance of the advice of the Election Commission of India to the contrary. Moreover these very forces have shown their utter intolerance and animosity against women enjoying any freedom of movement as evident from the recent incidents of attack on women in Mangalore by another sister concern of the *Sangh Parivar*, *Sri Ram Sena*.

The moot question looms large – if and when the august authority of a statutory and constitutional body like Election Commission, which is supposed to act as an honest arbitrator between the political parties over any dispute is itself challenged by a particular political conglomerate, then to whom shall the citizens of this country turn to as a last resort in the event of any violation of the code of conduct in the elections? Under these circumstances it is very much apprehended that the *hindutva* forces would do their utmost to pollute the electoral process with communal venom and thereby further the process of polarization of the already divided populace, and thereafter rig the polls by overt and covert means so as to pull anyhow the majority votes in their favour.

As well known across the country and beyond, more than a dozen camps sheltering a total of about thirty-five thousand persons were set up in various places in the immediate aftermath of the holocaust that broke out following the murder of Laxmanananda. However the people of this country outside Kandhamal are yet to know the hellish conditions that prevailed throughout in such government run camps for months at a stretch, which even animals will abhor to live in. The brutally substandard dietary and hygienic conditions of the camps apart, the state machinery with the help of the CRPF turned such refugee camps into concentration camps of the Nazi kind and took meticulous care to ensure that the inside truth of the camps does not come to the knowledge of the outside public and the refugee residents of the camps be not able to communicate to any outsider be he/she a relative, official or media person etc and share one's anguish and agony with them. Besides, the government officials all the while kept on pressurising the refugees to leave the camps at the earliest and return to their villages though they knew well that the villages were under the siege of the perpetrators completely hostile to the minority and Dalits.

The next ploy the government officials adopted to whisk away the refugees and thereby dismantle the camps was to lure them one by one to the so called compensation package against the damage suffered. Indeed it was a big farce. The damage assessment not having been made by any independent agency it was left to the mercy of subordinate officials of the government who prepared the purported survey in open consultation with the rioters themselves.

Now the government claims, normalcy has returned to Kandhamal. We say it is far from truth. Though the number of refugee camps has been reduced and replaced, still nearly three thousand persons are found to be languishing in the existing camps across Kandhamal. Thousands and thousands of people who as per the official record returned to their respective villages have not done so. No one knows where they are right now. Besides a few families who dared to return to their villages have been passing through days of pain and anguish due to the constant threat and hostility of the *hindutva* instigated villagers. No doubt, some innocent Adivasis might have been arrested and jailed by the police and administration, which should not have happened at all. But they were careful enough to let the real plotters of the riot go scot-free including even the so called *Kui* leaders, who openly used the words of violence and vendetta before the media and otherwise. On the pressure by the officials and moreover finding no way out some refugees returned to their respective villages, but alas! to receive a fresh shock from the

communalist section of villagers. The returnees are now being warned straight away, on the point of threat - leave your religion, pay fine for professing the said religion, withdraw all cases and vote for the candidate we have fielded.

It is an admitted reality that the Maoists by whatever nomenclature they are described by media and elsewhere have made their increasing presence throughout Kandhamal more so after the murder of Laxmanananda. As confirmed by the police they have also successively murdered three RSS activists one after another meanwhile. As a matter of fact, the Maoists have been taking these extremist measures precisely on the pretext that the entire State machinery has failed to stem the communal tide and nab the culprits and ensure safety and security to the religious minority, be they Dalits or Adivasis.

We are sure, unless and until the State addresses as per the mandate of the Constitution to the imperative of providing justice, peace and harmony and thereby protects the minority Dalits and Adivasis from the clutches of rabidly communal and fundamentalist forces in riot-torn Kandhamal, the Maoists would continue to expand and heighten their extremist agenda taking the impotence of the State as their pretext.

By the way, let it be made clear once again, the so-called break away Maoist faction called M-2, which has already earned enough notoriety for its ruthless acts of kidnap and murder against minority and Dalits, is a well carved out militant wing of the *hindutva* brigade deployed to physically exterminate every person whose voices his or her concern at the fast disintegrating composite, pluralist society of Kandhamal or at the woeful plight of an average citizen in a communally polarized situation like the one Kandhamal presents today.

To sum up, the dates of elections to Assembly and *Lok Sabha* are fast approaching but Kandhamal is still boiling in the communal cauldron with its electorate passing through a critical state of panic and disarray. Under the circumstances, the question that perturbs every sensible citizen - whether a free and fair electoral process, which is a must to ensure free and fair polls at the end of the day, is possible at all in today's Kandhamal?

We demand:

- 1. All political parties as well the Election Commission of India are asked to assess the situation diligently and take an appropriate action to the satisfaction of the minority, Dalits and Adivasis who have been victimized in the recent riots.*
- 2. Stop saffronising Kandhamal and ban Sangh Parivar organizations and arrest those who spread hate ideology, dividing people on the basis of religion.*
- 3. Place before the Assembly and citizens a white paper containing details of persons killed, properties damaged including charitable and religious institutions, complaints filed, FIRs, charge-sheets, arrests, bails and list of persons who have left the district after the violence.*

4. *Ensure security of life and property of all people.*
5. *Initiate fresh reassessment with the participation of the affected people using proper criteria and mechanism by competent, independent and professional agency.*
6. *Ensure basic human rights standards, transparency and accountability in all relief and rehabilitation measures. Guarantee proper living and sanitation conditions in the relief camps, with privacy for women, proper nutritional care to children and women.*
7. *Adequate compensatory measures should be taken up in case of children whose education is affected due to violence. Conduct special board exams at a later time, for those who could not appear for the board exam.*
8. *Ensure safe return of all the people who left the district and resettle them with adequate security in the next three months.*
9. *Suspend those officials who are hand in glove with the fundamentalists and failed in their responsibilities.*
10. *Ensure stringent and prompt action against those involved in the sexual harassment during communal violence and deal with sexual harassment cases of women by special courts sensitively and sympathetically, respecting the feelings and privacy of women.*
11. *Promote employment oriented education and vocational training to capacitate the youth employable. Provide quality and affordable education through residential schools to Dalits and Adivasis, and with separate schools for girls.*
12. *Ensure speedy and fair trial by handing over the cases related to the murder of innocent Christians and Hindus by communal forces, VHP leader Laxmanananda and the rape case of Sr. Meena to CBI without delay. Take measures to protect the witnesses.*
13. *Arrest those who instigate and involve in social boycotting in public places like shops, villages, government offices, PDS centers, by close monitoring.*
14. *Effectively implement Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 and SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 against those caste people who deny access to public places and disturb peace and harmony among the Adivasis and Dalits.*
15. *Take urgent measures to prevent the large-scale trafficking of women and children.*

16. Effectively implement minimum of 100 days work under NREGS and expand the scheme to cover a minimum of 200 days. Make special arrangement under NREGS for the victims of violence.

17. Ensure homestead land and a minimum of 10 acres of cultivable land to all the families of Adivasis, Dalits and landless families. Resettle and rehabilitate all the victims with proper housing.

18. Bring out a white paper on ownership and control over land, including lands in the hands of the government, traders and government officials.

19. Take immediate steps to accord minimum 50% reservation to women in the PRIs. Ensure proportionate representation of Dalits and Adivasis.

20. Strengthen the mission of NRHM by relating health to determinants of good health viz. segments of nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and safe drinking water. Ensure community participation in NRHM.

21. Initiate community based small-scale industries to promote marketing of Non-timber Forest Products (NTFP). Effectively implement Orissa Grama Panchayat (Minor Forest Produce Administration) Rules, 2002.

22. Protect the rights of Minorities, especially their Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion by rigorously implementing Art 25 of the Constitution.

23. Take up with a census commission to include Adivasi religions in the census and promote indigenous cultures, traditions, practices and languages.

Prepared by

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