



The Meeting Point

A Quarterly Newsletter of AREDIS

The smallest good deed is better than the grandest good intension

Issue - 12

April, 2011

Inside...

- ❖ Release of People's Manifesto
- ❖ Sand laden trucks, the Chariots of Death:

Release of People's Manifesto

Electoral scenario of Tamil Nadu:

Tamil Nadu state has witnessed 13 elections so far. Congress party, which is one of the national parties, ruled the state till 1967 after independence and after the first election in the free India. Because of its anti people policies and rule, it lost its respect in the state and paved way for the emergence of regional party and as a result, the regional Dravidian party – Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) - emerged as the alternative political force in the state. It too, because of the internal crises, successively bred Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) and a number of fractions with the passage of time. DMK and ADMK ruled the state one after another for 44 long years and it is the pity that Congress party has to cling with any of these two parties for securing seats in the state assembly.

Likewise, Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), which are also the national parties and the later has ruled three states in the India, also cling to any of these two main Dravidian parties or their latest fractions in the state.

Fourteenth election for the state assembly:

Election for the Tamil Nadu State Assembly falls on the 13th of April 2011. As usual, the political parties vie with each other to capture the political power by hook or crook and they are busy with releasing their electoral manifestos – no matter if they are material or immaterial to be realized. There are two main fronts in the fray and either is headed by DMK and ADMK. Each front has its own retinue of casteist, religious and amateur political parties.

During the last five-year period, the government headed by DMK gave out a number of freebies through special schemes, which the party had announced in its electoral manifesto in 2006. As it had promised, it distributed colour TV, liquefied petroleum gas connection and gas stove freely and offered medical service at free of cost to the below poverty line families. For retaining its vote bank, it has announced a number of freebies like grinder or mixie (blunder) to women.

The opposition parties yelled at the free schemes announced by the ruling party then and there in all the five years on the grounds that the free schemes insult the human dignity and make the people lazy. However, their protest drama prolonged till the election date was announced by the election commission. All and sundry parties - major and minor political parties, allied forces or individual parties – assured of free schemes that would really offend the human dignity in their electoral manifestos.

The main opposition party has announced of grinder, mixie and fan and twenty litres of mineral water to each family per month; fundamentalist party has announced of offering a cow to each family; another party has announced of financial assistance of Rs.2500 to every family a month.

The election commission repeatedly appeals to the people to examine if the free schemes could be realistic to be executed. The irony here is, while it is raising hue and cry about freebies, it does not curb the free schemes unethically announced by the political parties. Long live election commission.

People's Manifesto:

At this juncture, fourteen institutions, including civil society organizations and people's movements came together and framed a manifesto absolutely based on the needs and wants of the downtrodden masses, children, women, farmers, fisher men and people from all walks of life and for the restoration of livelihood resources.

It briefly describes about the impact of 59-year domestic rule on the environment and agricultural lands, education, food security, women and their participation of women in politics and mineral resources. In addition, it also explains the adverse impact of liquor policy, free schemes, globalization and the structural adjustment policies of the government on the life of people.

Making of People's Electoral Manifesto:

Fourteen organizations came together with genuine concern for the oppressed sections and the downtrodden masses in Tamil Nadu and formed the Forum for People's Manifesto (FPM). The key representatives of the fourteen organizations and movements discussed the socio-politico-economic and cultural atmosphere of the nation as well as the state in detail.

It took them six rounds of discussion for finalizing the design and the contents of the manifesto. Two discussions were held in regions and four discussions were held in Chennai, the state capital.

Further, each organization organized separate consultation with other NGOs and people's movements in their respective operational areas and discussed the draft manifesto. It added points and made amendments and shaped up the quality of the draft manifesto.

Core Committee Members of FPM:

1. People's Governance Cell (PGC), a programme unit of Association of Rural Education and Development Service
2. Church's Auxiliary for Social Action
3. Forum for Livelihood Rights – Tamil Nadu
4. CCFD, France
5. Eco Protection Force – India
6. Tamil Nadu Land Right Movement
7. Aid India – Chennai
8. State Forum for Livelihood – Tamil Nadu
9. Dalit Panchayat Presidents' Federation – Tamil Nadu
10. CIOSA – Tamil Nadu
11. Child Rights and You (CRY)– Tamil Nadu
12. Tamil Nadu Athi Andhra Maha Sabha (TAAMS) – Chennai
13. DHAVANI – Dharmapuri
14. ARAN Jothi Pengal Munnetra Sangam - Chennai

Release of People's Electoral Manifesto:

People's Electoral Manifesto was released in Chennai on the 25th of March 2011. Ms. Mohini Giri, the former chairperson of Women's Commission, released the People's Manifesto and Mr. L. A. Samy, the state convener of Forum for Livelihood Rights received the copy. Eminent social activists like Ms. Vasanthi Devi (child rights activist) and Mr. Thiyagu (Tamil Desia Viduthalai lyakkam) were among the notable chief guests.

Posters bearing the salient demands extracted from the People's Manifesto were also released on the day. Dr. S. S. Rajagopal, senior educationist released the posters. A website for the FPM was also launched on the day by Ms. Vasanthi Devi (child rights activist) as well. A press meet was also organized in this regard for publicizing the People's Manifesto at a wider level.

Subsequently, the same People's Manifesto was released in Karur district on the 1st of April 2011 at KVR Hotel, Karur.

Mr. L. A. Samy, the convener of the Forum for Livelihood Rights (FLR). Karur district presided over the meeting: "The Indian constitution assures of social protection and social development of the citizens and poverty alleviation. It is the duty of the parliamentarians to carry out what the constitution tells of and that is why we vote them. However, there is no definite policy on agriculture, which only can ensure food security in India, but there is an industrial policy.



People do not question this inconsistency of the rulers and in their ruling. In order to hoodwink the people, the government distributes freebies and the people too crave for the industrial products like TV, cell phone etc. that give temporary pleasure and convenience. Therefore, we should cast our vote to the right candidates, who aspire to execute the constitutional prescriptions. For this, we have to get the consent and assurance of the candidates over fulfilling the statutory duties. That is why we have prepared this manifesto.

We representatives from different organizations have gathered together to discuss the things that are to be included in the manifestos of all the political parties. It is an indicator of the rising awareness among the affected communities in the state.

Today's rulers build bridges, lay roads construct buildings and call it as development and achievement. We have been demanding total prohibition of liquor for the betterment of the poor people for long but the rulers let the TASMAL shop proliferate in the state. In the same way we have been demanding the government to check the illegal sand mining and the water contamination by the dyeing industries in our district for years but the government authorities show an indifference to our demands.

Besides, many human lives were killed by the sand laden trucks in the district. That is why we have focused on the three main issues— illegal sand mining, water pollution by the dyeing industries and liquor shops, which prevail in Karur district – in the manifesto.”

Representatives of different movements participated in the meeting and spoke, relating the People's Manifesto with the socio-political-economic and cultural atmosphere in Karur district.



Mr. Karikalan, the district convener of Dalit Rights Awareness Liberation Movement (DRALM), Mr. Ramasamy, the president of the Association of farmers affected by the dyeing industry effluents, Mr. Duraisamy, the convener of Farmers study centre, Mr. Sanmugam, the president of Kisan farmers' Association, Mr. Rajasekar, the treasurer of Forum for Protection of Water and Livelihood Resources (FPWLR), Mr Senthil Kumar, the district convener of People's Development Movement (PDM), Mr. Velu, the district secretary of Karur District all Labourers' Union (KADALU), Mr. James, the district convener of the Alternative Front for Dalit Liberation and Anusuya, the president of Tulir Thalir Students' Movement (Movement for young and adolescent school children) (TTSM) were the members who explained the context of the manifesto with social relevance.

Mr. L. A. Samy released the People's Manifesto and Mr. Sanmugam received a copy of it. Ms. Jayammal, the president of SWATE, released the posters and Mr. Thnagavel received a copy of it.

Also, a press meet was held at the end and personnel from different printing and visual media came and covered the proceedings and interviewed Mr. L. A. Samy and other participants.



Sand laden trucks, the Chariots of Death:

The National Highway that stretches between Trichy and Karur is busy round the clock with vehicular movements and particularly with a myriad number of trucks that carry away sand. When a truck is loaded with sand, it is loaded along with litres of soft water. This water drips down all along the road and makes the road slippery and makes cesspools at the low-lying points on the road and thus creates chances for road mishaps. When there is a hue and cry for banning bottling plants all over the globe – for their unlimited exploitation of ground water - the illegal mining operation wastes gallons of water every day.

Besides, the trucks take away the lives of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Many of the truck drivers, though they have driving license, are not properly skilled in driving. It is the general opinion of the people about the truck drivers that they do not follow traffic rules and as proving this opinion, it is these trucks that involve in accidents and cause gory deaths. Since the truck drivers are aware that they are part of illegal sand mining operation, they drive trucks rashly in a devil-may-care manner.

Rash driving clubbed with the recklessness of truck drivers causes a number of accidents in this stretch of National Highway Paper news and the police records substantiate this statement. In addition, numbers road blockade demonstrated by the people against the sand lifting trucks also stand as foolproof evidence to the fact. The loud cry of the family members of the deceased and their tears did not move the government to take steps to curb the illegal sand mining and prevent accidents.

As usual an accident – but it proved to be an unusual one - took place on the 15th of March 2011 in which Ms. Cynthia, who was an engineering student, died on the spot as the wheel of the truck ran over her head. She was the daughter of a staff of AREDS Health Team. Her father is the elected president of Veerarakiyam panchayat (local body). The villagers of Veerarakiyam and the college students came in throngs to the accident spot and blocked the load, on hearing the news.

Since the accident took place on the Trichy – Karur national highway, the traffic came to a standstill and hundreds of vehicles were detained immediately after the accident. No doubt, it should have created a lot of inconveniences to the commuters and passengers. The accident took place by 08. 30 A.M. and the traffic was hindered for nearly five hours but the collector came only in the afternoon.

As the district administrative authorities were found lethargic in visiting the site and setting the things right, the villagers and the students ran amok and broke the windows of the other sand laden trucks that were blocked on either side of the road. Then, the district collector came,

mitigated the crowd simmering with wrath and assured by writing of regulating the plying of trucks.

From the very next day of the accident, the truck movement has been regularized and the trucks ply on the highway only on the time stipulated by the district administration. As a result, the truck movement is checked during the peak hours both in the morning and the evening.

Illegal sand mining operation defeats aspirations and happiness:

Ms. Cynthia's family belongs to Arunthathiyar community, which is the lower most caste among Dalit communities. Here in Tamil Nadu, the people of this community only involve in manual scavenging and therefore, they are being looked down upon even by the other categories of dalit community.



Her father Mr. Mahamuni was AREDS old staff. So long as he worked with AREDS, he performed well as a teacher of Non-Formal Education programme executed by AREDS. With the training imparted by AREDS on human rights, social analysis and leadership qualities, he proved his worth as a good social activist. He fervently fought for the upliftment of his own community, witnessing the oppression of the caste Hindu people and the plight of Arunthathiyar community people. Above all, he also took effort to secure the basic amenities to his panchayat, so that all people, irrespective of caste disparity, could enjoy the benefits.

It was his love for humanity that rewarded him the position of President of his panchayat. As the panchayat president, he executed panchayat works meticulously, particularly the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and won the hearts of the people of his panchayat.

Ms. Cynthia's brother is a marine engineer and he sails across the world as his profession warrants. It brought a lot of happiness and hope to her family. Both of them attended the child-centered programmes organized by AREDS. It is always AREDS' aspiration that children from the oppressed communities must come up with higher education and good profession in the society.

AREDS' aspirations and its planned movement against illegal sand mining are two different things. The illegal sand mining can be stopped only when the government pays heed to the voice of the people and act accordingly. But, the former is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound, if the AREDS' direction and the parents care for their children and aim of the children go in one line.

Many a time, the aspirations of AREDS are being realized as in the case of Ms. Cynthia's family. However, the happiness of her family and AREDS' feel-proud impact was crushed under the wheel of a sand laden truck. The truck driver was not a foe to Ms. Cynthia and her family. It is the illegal sand mining operation that brought death in the form of a truck to her.

In all these years, hundreds of human lives have been taken away by trucks involved in illegal sand mining operation. AREDS, with remote sensing to preserve the ecology-environment of

Cauvery - Amaravathi river basins and to safeguard human lives, organized the people in thousands and built up different forms of mighty movements. People, who had realized that their very livelihood was at stake due to over mining of sand, took to the streets at the call of AREDS on several occasions.

The contractor, being infuriated, let his rowdies loose on SWATE and they set the SWATE office shed on arson on the night of the 7th of March 1999. Women's organizations, woman activists, SHG members held a protest demonstration against this atrocity and protested the tacit support of the government to the perpetrators. In response to the protest, the then so-called democratic government arrested the protestors.

Presently, with the regulated truck movements after the death of Ms. Cynthia, the pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, particularly the school-going and the college-going students relieve a heave of sigh and feel fortunate to us the road.

However, it was unfortunate that it took a quite long time for the district administration to regularize the movement of sand carrying trucks after many casualties. It is still more unfortunate because the district administration has only framed a time schedule for the truck movement and it certainly has not checked or regularized the illegal sand mining. Anyway, AREDS has been relentlessly fighting against illegal sand mining since 1990, hopefully of stopping the illegal sand mining someday and restoring water and livelihood resources in Karur district.

Last but not the least:

We take this opportunity to thank all those partners who have made their annual contribution to the efforts of AREDS-SHARE. Their sincere and generous help is the one that moves our commitment and to reach out. Your timely contribution made out of your personal sacrifices can be sent to the following accounts of AREDS SHARE:

For Belgium Partners

Account N°: 000 - 0000034 - 34 of ENTRAIDE ET FRA TERNITE
32 Rue du Gouvernement Provisoire B 1000 BRUXELLES
avec la mention :pour le projet AREDS Inde 10-499

For Partners in France and the rest of the World

Centre L.-J. Lebret
en France, (uniquement en EURO) sur BNP PARIBAS – Compte 10039291
IBAN FR76 3000 4001 8700 0100 3929 110 – BIC: BNPAFRPPRG

Yours in solidarity,

L. A. Samy

**Publisher: Association of Rural Education and Development Service (AREDS),
Renganathapuram & Post, Krishnarayapuram Taluk, Karur District, Tamil Nadu, India.**