

# **PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO 2009**

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## Foreword

It's an election moment. It is a time to look back as well as to set the agenda for tomorrow. Every time, the Indian electorate has taken the decision makers and many other stakeholders by surprise. They have largely shattered the predictions, exit poll outcomes and media verdicts. The Indian masses are economically poor and their voices might be politically feeble. But repeatedly their sense of political judgement, despite massive luring and wooing of voters with tall promises, proved that they are supreme in democracy.

This is yet another politically opportune time as the Indian electorate goes to the 15<sup>th</sup> General Elections. There are many unanswered questions in their minds. They continue to discuss the destiny of this country in tea stalls, bus stops, and local trains as well in work places and in the corridors of the government offices during their 'waiting' time.

To facilitate linkages between the voices of the masses and the future decision makers, South Asian Peoples' Initiatives (SAPI) and Indian Social Institute, New Delhi jointly organized a national workshop in Delhi, on People's Manifesto 2009 (PM 2009). Many from grassroots organizations, representatives of people's movements, NGOs, civil and democratic groups, faith-based and secular organisations and committed individuals, activists and academicians across the states participated in the workshop, to collectively reflect on the present socio-economic, politico-cultural scenario. To progressively realise human and democratic rights as enshrined in the Constitution, the participants felt the need to rearticulate their vision of a new and inclusive India, considering the challenges and opportunities of the time.

The People's Manifesto 2009 is the outcome of this deliberation. Later the draft manifesto was reached to many individuals and organisations and a large number of them have endorsed it. Unlike manifestos of the political parties, who have made this democratic discourse a mere political

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ritual, PM 2009 is an agenda for action, of and by the civil society groups. By publishing PM 2009, an earnest appeal is made to all the political parties to include these demands in their party manifesto and implement the same. These demands will continue to echo in the next coming five years at the panchayats, blocks, districts, states and national levels. PM 2009 will be used to mobilise and build people's power to determine the course of history and to restore the values enshrined in the Constitution.

We appeal to all citizens of India to circulate this document widely and initiate discussions at many levels so that informed decisions are made by the electorate and collectively we could usher in a vibrant secular democratic India.

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Coordinator SAPI  
20.03.2009

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Director ISI

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## People's Manifesto - 2009

The Indian electorate and the political parties are gearing towards the 15<sup>th</sup> General Elections. This is the day of judgement for political parties and the people are the judges. The people will decide how well the elected representatives of political parties have promoted the interests of the common people. The poor of the country, to a large extent, feel that they have become victims of the narrow interest of the political parties and their anti-people ideologies. The marginalised communities like the dalits, adivasis, women, minorities, unorganized and traditional workers, and youth who have faced historical and systemic injustices all along, feel that they have been pushed further to periphery to eke out their survival. The anger is palpable as the poor are more determined now to engage in the second freedom struggle to assert their economic, social and cultural rights along with civil and political rights. In the diminishing space of social and economic democracy, mere political democracy has provided little benefit to the people. This cannot continue.

The type of development that is being promoted in India is lopsided, resulting in the widening of the gap between the rich and poor. The wealth that is produced by millions of people finally lands up in the hands of a few, living in the rich enclaves. Though India is not poor but the number of poor in the country is on the increase. It is feared that the failure to ensure equitable development may lead to social unrest and eventually to the derailment of the reform process itself. In order to make the Indian corporate globally competitive, the government is all out in framing policies to support the Indian entrepreneurs at the expense of the masses. The country's new liberal policy, which is supported by every political party from left to right, regional to national, has led to the increased contractualization, informalization, outsourcing, casualization and feminisation of work and the closure of small-scale industries. It is said that India's economy continues to blaze away at 8% or more. But who shares in this growth? The present strategy of development has dispossessed large number of people of their livelihood, forcing millions of workers to live under the 'tyranny of market raj'. Hence, we need a new paradigm of development which will be inclusive and holistic, sustainable and environment friendly.

A humane ideology and a rapid shrinking of democratic space have been the casualty in the context of the compulsions of coalition politics, with its focus on opportunistic alliances to win votes and get the numbers. To cite an instance: the double standard of the UPA government, which on the one hand, hastily passed Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act and thus enabled the appropriation of agricultural land from the farmers, resulting in farmers' suicides; on the other hand it provided employment opportunities through NREGA. Nandigram, Singur and Chengara have exposed the hidden motives and real intentions of the Left parties. Capitalism and market-led globalization have produced more problems than have offered solutions as the recent global recession has unfolded. It is ironical that the government, instead of supporting the millions of poor who have become victims of the global recession, continues to be on the side of the corporate and shows keen interest in bailing out big business houses.

The NDA, led by BJP continues to promote the ideology of 'one Nation, one People and one Culture' ideology, trying to re-establish manuvada in this country. 'Unity in uniformity' is preferred by them to the cherished Indian ethos of 'unity in diversity'. The hate ideology promoted by these forces has divided the communities based on religion, pitting one against the other as it had happened in Kandhamal in Orissa, attack on women in the name of moral policing in Karnataka etc. The politics of annihilation and hate, regionalism and majoritarianism with a view to convert India into a religious-cultural nationalist state will not be tolerated at any cost.

Terrorism is projected as the major concern and huge money of the tax payers is diverted to buy arms and ammunitions to protect the nation state. We condemn all types of terrorism and in the same voice we also condemn state terrorism, victimisation of minorities and enactment of black laws like POTA, NSA etc. State terrorism is not an answer to terrorism. Under the garb of national security the state had infringed the human rights of the civil and democratic organisations. Many committed activists and members of people's movements have become victims of the state terrorism.

In these harsh contexts of life and living, the marginalized sections of

society especially, the adivasis, dalits, women, minorities, unorganized workers and youth, traditional workers like fisherfolk, and many other marginalised communities are loosing faith in the commitment of the politicians. They do not believe, any more, in the many promises made at election time. Reaffirming their faith in democracy the poor like to determine the nation's agenda and want every political party and those who contest in the elections to adhere to this people's manifesto. They now want a government that will restore their faith in their elected representatives through a transparent and people-friendly form of government.

We therefore, the secular, democratic and social organizations and various peoples' movements, voicing the concerns of the aam admi of the country from all parts of the country, demand the following. We want action on the ground and commitment to protection of human rights and pro-poor development paradigm. We have articulated certain rights of the people that have remained, so far, teasing illusions. This People's Manifesto points out only the urgent and non-negotiable national level demands and they are not exhaustive. These demands will be better concretized according to the local needs and conditions of people in different parts of the country. An on-going social audit and social equity audit is what we plan to do at every level to monitor the commitment of the parties. We will not wait for the next election. We resolve to embark on this long and challenging journey and we invite you to join us in partnership to build an egalitarian, inclusive, secular, democratic and cultural-pluralist India.

Hence, WE DEMAND,

### 1. **Protect and preserve life and security:**

- ✓ Guarantee life with dignity, freedom from fear of violence, and peaceful coexistence.
- ✓ Promote friendly relationship with neighbouring countries, bring down defence budget and promote national security by mutual dialogue.
- ✓ Take immediate and effective measures to prevent starvation deaths, farmers and traditional workers and artisans committing suicide, deaths of malnourished children and women

particularly in rural areas.

- ✓ Enact laws to promote food security and protect food sovereignty through comprehensive farmer/landless peasants/agricultural workers centric agrarian reforms.
- ✓ Make the PDS a transparent and well-functioning system to provide food security to the weaker sections of society; Include millets, pulses and edible oil.
- ✓ Make the Annapurna, Antyodaya, old age and widow pension Schemes more effective and operational.

## **2. Promote peace and harmony guaranteeing human rights:**

- ✓ Protect common persons from arbitrary arrest and illegal detention and being subjected to torture and inhuman treatment. Abolish capital punishment. Remove the legal impunity that police and other agencies now enjoy.
- ✓ Repeal 'The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act' and all draconian laws like POTA, NSA, COFEPOSA, COCA etc. Dismantle 'Salwa Judum' immediately.
- ✓ Stop using Anti terror law against the poor and minorities and human rights movements.
- ✓ Ensure right to free expression, association, assembly and democratic dissent.
- ✓ Promote peace and harmony across the multi-ethnic, multi religious, multi-cultural communities based on justice.

## **3. Guarantee basic necessities and rights of all:**

- ✓ Provision of free and compulsory elementary education till age 14 to all, as their fundamental right; provide additional funds to implement this; Government should not shirk its constitutional responsibility to provide education for all. Establish and support a mechanism to assess quality of education.
- ✓ The national curriculum framework be the normative curriculum for all categories of schools. Schools, which do not conform to it, be derecognized. Monitor quality provision as strictly in government-run schools as in private schools.
- ✓ Ensure quality and affordable health to all with special focus

on rural areas, women and children

- ✓ Revitalize the largely non-functioning Primary Health Centres. Establish good hospitals in the rural areas to provide health care at affordable cost.
- ✓ Give priority to promote indigenous and alternative health care system and provide financial and institutional support for research in this area.
- ✓ As most of our diseases are water-borne, ensure safe drinking water to all
- ✓ Housing is a human right. Mere eviction of slum dwellers is not the answer but provide low cost housing to all close to their work place.
- ✓ National Security expenditures and defence budget to be brought lower than that of education and health care.

## **4. Provide work and expand livelihood opportunities:**

- ✓ Make employment a fundamental right; Enact National Minimum Wage Policy, ensuring that the daily wage worker gets a minimum living wage of Rs.300 a day.
- ✓ Promote rural development and stop developing only towns and cities.
- ✓ Closely monitor the working of 100 days of National Rural Employment Gurarantee Act (NREGA) and expand its scope to minimum of 200 days. Enact law to guarantee employment of the urban poor.
- ✓ Do not abrogate rights of labour and ensure labour protection by effectively implementing labour laws in private and public companies.
- ✓ Resist mechanisation and encourage labour oriented technologies
- ✓ Repeal Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act and make industrialization more farmer-friendly, ensuring both land rights and opportunities for advancement in life and earning. No acquisition of land without the informed consent of the Gram Sabhas, local communities, farmers, particularly the women. Do not create foreign territories in Indian soil.
- ✓ Land for land should be the basis for rehabilitation. Conduct

- referendum, public hearing before acquiring land from people.
- ✓ Treat water as a national and common resource and stop all privatization or sale of water bodies like river, tanks, ponds etc.
- ✓ Increase and ensure minimum support price for agricultural produce to the farmers and promote agri-produce cooperatives for better marketing of the produce.
- ✓ Promote small and cottage industry and provide interest free loan for the farmers.
- ✓ Make no compromise with developed nations on agricultural subsidy and Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA).

### 5. **Protect and promote Dalits, Adivasis and Indigenous Peoples:**

- ✓ Enact a comprehensive National Dalit Policy and National Tribal Policy to ensure the identity, culture and human rights of these marginalized communities
- ✓ No development at the cost of dalits, adivasis and traditional workers. Stop development induced displacement and Expand the Fifth Schedule to cover all the adivasis.
- ✓ Ensure the participation and partnership of indigenous communities in the developmental process and make them owners of the land, water, forest and mineral resources; Recognize and acknowledge Indigenous Peoples' contribution to nation building.
- ✓ Create a Central University to develop and preserve dalit and adivasi culture, languages and identity.
- ✓ Ensure complete, time bound and enforced eradication and abolition of manual scavenging and provide alternative employment.
- ✓ Provide homestead land to dalits and adivasis and ensure minimum of 3 acres of cultivable land to all.
- ✓ Ensure Adivasi access to forest and Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and dalit, traditional communities' access to common property resources.
- ✓ Restore all the alienated lands of the tribals and other sections.
- ✓ Fill up, within a short time frame of a year, the huge backlog

- of vacant reserved seats in the government services for the dalits and adivasis. Assure reservations in private sector.
- ✓ Rights of the traditional fisherfolk as mentioned in Coastal Regulation Zone 1991, should not be amended or diluted.
- ✓ Scrap Coastal Management Zone and promote the welfare of the traditional fisherfolk.

### 6. **Advance and strengthen gender justice:**

- ✓ Take immediate steps to accord minimum 33% reservation to women in assemblies and parliament and increase their representation to 50% in the PRIs. Ensure proportionate representation of dalits and tribals.
- ✓ Enforce equal wages for equal work for both women and men.
- ✓ Ensure stringent and prompt action to punish those found guilty of sexual harassment in the work places.
- ✓ Enact Domestic Workers law to ensure their rights, dignity and security and prevent exploitation by the agencies that recruit domestic workers.
- ✓ Take urgent measures to prevent the large-scale trafficking of women and children.
- ✓ Enact strong legislations to check female foeticide and infanticide.
- ✓ Promote economic empowerment of rural poor women.

### 7. **Ensure freedom of religion and minority rights:**

- ✓ Enact Communal Violence (Prohibition) Act within a year, to end all forms of communal violence and to curb states overtly and covertly engaging in communal violence. Take effective measures to deal with organizations involved in communal violence.
- ✓ Ensure Equal rights to Dalit Christians and Muslims. Eliminate discrimination based on religion and repeal para 3 of 1950 Presidential Order. Make public and implement the Ranganath Misra Commission Report.
- ✓ Quick and adequate compensation be made to victims Sikh victims of 1984; Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984; Gujarat victims

of 2002; Kandhamal victims of 2008.

- ✓ Implement the major recommendations of the Sachar Commission Report on Muslims and ensure and promote education of Muslim women.
- ✓ Repeal all anti conversion laws and ban all the re-conversion gatherings such as "*ghar vapasi*"
- ✓ Any attempt to offend religious sentiments, respect for the other or to distort the history and cultural diversity of India in the minds of young in educational system should be stopped.

### **8. Promote transparency in governance, accountability and people's participation:**

- ✓ Strengthen the office of Comptroller and Auditor General; Conduct periodic social audit of the various government departments and private companies, as a public-private exercise.
- ✓ Promote transparency and accountability in governance by effectively implementing of RTI both in the private and public sector.
- ✓ Initiate and strengthen *Lokpal*, *Lokayukta* and form independent vigilant bodies at every governing structure to stop corruption and make certain transparency; Penalize the bureaucrats, government officials including the members of judiciary and legislature, when found guilty of corrupt practices.
- ✓ Speed up the judicial reforms to reach justice to the poor. Appoint the vacant posts of Judges and clean up the system off corruption.
- ✓ Those communities and groups which are seeking political space in and through identity assertion movements, should not be perceived as a threat to the national integrity and countered with arms, rather the state should dialogue acknowledging the needs and aspirations of the communities.

### **9. Preserve environment and promote sustainable development:**

- ✓ That no development project should be sanctioned at the cost of environmental damage.

- ✓ Actively support and expand organic farming; ban with immediate effect the Genetically Modified seeds.
- ✓ Strictly implement the environment protection laws as they apply to industrial effluents and disposal of hazardous materials.
- ✓ Appoint a commission to look into the effect of alcohol and tobacco products on the health of the nation and formulate policy on their sale with the purpose of eventually banning them.

**Organizations that participated and endorsed:**

**Agricultural Training Centre**, Ranchi, Jharkhand; **AROUSE**, Gumla, Jharkhand; **Asha Deep**, Jharkhand; **Ashadeep - Human Development Centre**, Anand, Gujarat; **Ashram Abhiyan**, Patna, Bihar; **Bagaicha**, Ranchi, Jharkhand; **Catholic Union**, New Delhi; **CDS**, Dwarka, New Delhi; **Guru Kripa Society**, Ropar, Punjab; **Indian Social Institute**, Bangalore, Karnataka; **Indian Social Institute**, New Delhi; **Institute of Development, Education, Action and Studies (IDEAS)**, Madurai, Tamilnadu; **IPA Network India**, Delhi; **Jagruthi**, Vijayawada, Andhrapradesh; **Jeevan Mashaal Samiti**, Rohtas, Bihar; **Jeevan Vikas Maitri**, Pathalgaon, Chattisgarh; **Jilla Mahila Samiti**, Chaibasa, Jharkhand; **Johar - Human Resources Development Centre**, Dumka, Jharkhand; **KAMI**, Kodaikanal, Tamilnadu; **KARISAL**, Alangulam, Tamilnadu; **Lok Raj Sangathan**, New Delhi; **Loyola College of Social Service**, Trivandrum, Kerala; **Loyola Integrated Tribal Development Society**, Andhra Pradesh; **Nirmala Niketan**, New Delhi; **NKJE & CS**, Karnataka; **Nyay Darshan**, Vadodara, Gujarat; **Nyaya Jyothi**, Trivandrum, Kerala; **Paharia Seva Samiti**, Satia, Jharkhand; **Parcham**, Muzaffarpur, Bihar; **People's Campaign for Socio-Economic Equality in Himalayas**, Himachal Pradesh; **Rohtas Educational and Associated Programmes (REAP)**, Sasaram, Bihar; **Sampurna Vikas Samiti**, Aurangabad, Bihar; **Social Action Centre**, Villupuram, Tamilnadu; **Sona Santal Samaj Samiti**, Kodma, Jharkhand; **South Asian Peoples' Initiatives (SAPI)**, New Delhi; **South Indian Forum for Dalit Policy**, Andhrapradesh; **St. Ann's Stree Shakthi Centre**, Andhrapradesh; **St. Xavier's College**, Trivandrum, Kerala; **Tribal Research and Training Centre (TRTC)**, Chaibasa, Jharkhand; **Udayani Social Action Forum**, Kolkata, West Bengal; **Visakha Mahila Seva Sangam**, Andhra Pradesh; **Xavier Institute of Social Action**, Raipur, Chattisgarh; **Yuva Jumur**, Chaibasa, Jharkhand

**Other Endorsing Organizations:**

**Action for Human Rights and Liberation Centre (AHAL)**, Kilpennathur, Tamilnadu; **Adivasi Mulvasi Sangathan**, Dumka, Jharkhand; **All Bengal Collaborators for Development (ABCD)**,

Kolkata, West Bengal; **Awami Bharat**, Mumbai, Maharashtra; **Behavioural Science Centre (BSC)**, Ahmedabad, Gujarat; **Bindrai Institute for Research Study and Action (BIRSA)**, Ranchi, Jharkhand; **BIRSA/JOHAR**, Chaibasa, Jharkhand; **C.S.R.D. College**, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra; **Chitrabani**, Kolkata, West Bengal; **Deesha Trust**, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra; **Ekta (Committee for Communal Amity)**, Mumbai; **Holy Cross Social Service Centre**, Mundgod, Karnataka; **Hotline Delhi**, New Delhi; **Jan Vikas Kendra**, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand; **Jyothi Health Centre**, Mundgod, Karnataka; **Kalanganrai**, Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu; **Kolhan Mahila Samittee**, Chaibasa, Jharkhand; **Legal Action, Advocacy and Services (LAAS)**, Madurai, Tamilnadu; **Loyola Vikas Kendra (LVK)**, Mundgod, Karnataka; **Nav Jeevan Trust**, Shevgaon, Maharashtra; **Navnirman Trust**, Shrirampur, Maharashtra; **Navsarjan**, Surat, Gujarat; **Nishan**, Kurukshetra, Haryana; **Nityaseva Hospital**, Shevgaon, Maharashtra; **North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC)**, Guwahati, Assam; **Org-Movement for Peace & Justice**, Mumbai, Maharashtra; **People's Education and Action in Kodaikanal (PEAK)**, Tamilnadu; **Prashant, A Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace**, Ahmedabad, Gujarat; **Presentation Society of India**, New Delhi; **Raha Trust**, Mumbai; **Sahodaya**, Mangalore, Karnataka; **Sangath**, Modasa, Gujarat; **Shakti - Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre**, Songadh, Gujarat; **Shramik Abhivrudhi Sangh**, Belgaum, Karnataka; **Sidha-Kanhu Hul Baisi**, Jharkhand; **Social Centre**, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra; **St. Luke's Hospital**, Shrirampur, Maharashtra; **St. Mary's Social Centre**, Newasa, Maharashtra; **St. Xavier's Social Service Society (SXSSS)**, Ahmedabad, Gujarat; **Swades**, Goa



**South Asian Peoples' Initiatives (SAPI)** believes in and promotes democratic, egalitarian, secular, cultural-pluralist society through collective thinking, research and action, with and on behalf of the marginalized communities: Dalits, Adivasis, Women, Unorganized workers, Youth and Children. SAPI invites and collaborates with individuals, NGOs and People's Movements at the State, National and South Asian levels.

**दक्षिण एशिया जन संवाद (SAPI)** - प्रजातांत्रिक, समतावादी, धर्मनिरपेक्ष, बहुलवाद सांस्कृतिक समाज में विश्वास करता है और दलित, आदिवासी, महिलाओं, असंगठित मजदूरों, युवा और बच्चों के साथ सीमान्त समुदायों के पक्ष में सामूहिक विचारों एवं शोध कार्य को बढ़ावा देता है। यह मंच राज्य, राष्ट्रीय और दक्षिण एशिया स्तर पर सहयोग करने के लिए व्यक्तिगत, स्वयंसेवी संस्थाओं और जन-संगठनों को निमंत्रित करता है।

**Indian Social Institute (ISI) - New Delhi**, established in 1951, engages in action research, networking, collaboration and involvement with peoples' struggles and movements to enhance peoples' right to live a dignified life as well as to evolve a just, democratic and secular society, where human rights are upheld, diversity is respected and the holistic development of all is promoted. Our priority groups are the marginalized, the exploited and the excluded, namely the tribals, Dalits, women, and urban and rural poor. Through research, training and action we advocate their cause and concerns.

सन् 1951 में स्थापित नयी दिल्ली स्थित **भारतीय सामाजिक संस्थान (ISI)**, सम्मान के साथ जीने के अधिकार को बढ़ाने एवम् मानवाधिकार, विभिन्नता, तथा पूर्ण विकास के मूल्यों को प्रोत्साहित करने तथा न्यायपूर्ण, प्रजातांत्रिक एवम् धर्मनिरपेक्ष समाज विकसित करने की हैसियत से कार्यवाही-शोध, नेटवर्किंग, सहयोग और लोगों के संघर्षों तथा आंदोलनों के साथ कार्यरत है। हमारे प्राथमिक दल है- शोषित, वंचित और हाशिये के लोग जैसे आदिवासी, दलित, महिलाएं और शहरी तथा ग्रामीण गरीब। शोध, प्रशिक्षण और कार्य के द्वारा हम उनके मुद्दों और समस्याओं को प्रचारित करते हैं।