



people's manifesto

people's alliance for democracy

People's Manifesto

Karnataka faces yet another Assembly election on May. The state has seen several elections in the last 60 years. People have voted out parties and politicians who do not respond to their aspirations and installed new ones in their place. But the experience over and over again has been that they have felt betrayed by every new person and party they vote to power. The losers in every such exercise are invariably the voters since no political party has remained loyal to the cause of the people.

After the 2004 election failed to give majority to one party, there were two alliances forced, first between JDS and Congress and later between BJP and JDS. The repulsive drama on the issue of transfer of power that took place just before BJP-JDS alliance broke up convinced people that their vote and the entire electoral process had little value.

Governments were formed in luxury resorts and not in the Vidhar Soudha, the legitimate seat of power. Big real-estate cartels and mining lords, who have bled the natural wealth of this state, were buying and selling the entire democratic machinery in this farce of government formation. It is more than clear that they are the men holding all the controls in the current elections too.

Parties which speak of ideological positions before elections throw all ideology to wind once in power. That was how a party like JDS which called itself secular could forge an alliance with the communal BJP in Karnataka and the so-called pro-dalit BSP could join hands with the explicitly Brahminical

party BJP elsewhere in the country. How do we then trust the “ideologies” the parties espouse?

In a democracy all votes have the same value. This valuable right was gained after years of struggle of the people against monarchy in Europe and against the British rule in India. But common people have consistently been losing to wealthy politicians and capitalist powers in every election. This means that democracy itself is getting corroded with every electoral process.

The electoral process is based on the principle that the common citizen is the king. But what exactly is the role of the common man in all the elections in the last 60 years in our country? The poor have bent down and lent their backs as stepping stones for the rich and powerful to ascend to the throne. Their bare backs have often received whiplashes in this process. They have watched as helpless spectators as their land and resources have been increasingly robbed off them. This is not the story of one election in one state, but a story that gets played out again and again. The coming elections will be no exception to this process.

What then should we do in this election? Should we recoil from the whole process and stay away? Should we lend our backs yet again for another ascent to power? Or should we look for new ways to make the electoral process more meaningful?

We – a group of organisations and individuals who are concerned about a democratic process being reduced to a farce – are trying to find a new way of participating in the democratic process without becoming either indifferent and cynical or simply cogs in the sinister political designs of any party. It is a coalition that aspires to prevent parties and people who work

completely contrary to the interests of people from coming to power. It hopes to grow into a counter, pro-people force that can build pressure on parties to work on principles and stick to the promises they make during elections.

The first meeting of our coalition discussed the fact that BJP is a serious contender to power in this election. Though there is hardly any difference between JDS, Congress and BJP in their stand on economic principles, the meeting unanimously felt that BJP is the greatest threat to the social fabric of this country. The party works against the fundamental premise of religious amity, equality and casteless society which is the very foundation of a democratic set up. It is opposed to the principle that dalits, minorities, backward castes, women and the poor of this country should get equal opportunities in all fields. In fact it has been party that has espoused second class citizenship to minorities, massacred them at every possible opportunity and even defended it publicly. It is a party that believes in serving its own selfish interests by creating disharmony among people. Preventing such an anti-democratic party from coming to power is the first priority of our coalition, the meeting decided.

At the same time we should warn all political parties not to betray the promises made to people during elections. We want to convene a meeting of and release “people’s manifesto” that represents the interests of common people. We urge all political parties to respond to this manifesto.

We urge people not to vote for BJP since it is a party that works blatantly against the interests of people. We also urge people to vote judiciously to any other party after carefully analyzing how they respond to the aspirations of the people.

What kind of a society do we desire for?

We march ahead putting forward our spaces of worship like the Maths and Mosques to perpetrate superstition. Education has become a commodity that largely depends on an individual's buying power. Health is also measured on the balance and is sold off the shelf. Government schools and hospitals exist only in name and have been handed over to private players. They have cast their eyes even on the fistful of rice on the poor man's plate. Slowly the public distribution system is being destroyed through devious methods and the poor are forced to buy from regular shops itself. Land grabbers who have benefited in the name of SEZs get big tax rebates, so do those who manufacture for export, people who have property worth crores get huge tax benefits, but the poor man's Bhagyajyoti scheme now comes with a bill, the price of kerosene has gone up ten-fold, water and electricity meters have been installed for them, and prices have spiraled. Who is responsible for this? Politicians across parties. Their guiding forces are not the Buddha-Basava-Gandhi-Ambedkar but Bush-Birla-Narayan Murthy-Mallya. They are not bound by the constitution, but by WTO, IMF and the World Bank. This has to change. A democracy for people, builds a society for people. We desire an egalitarian society where there is freedom for creativity, inhabited by educated, aware, healthy minds. We condemn this society that is galloping towards inequality, oppression and cruelty. We demand for a society that turns towards the weak, a society that aims at establishing equality, that turns hate into mutual love, and instate rules that brings about wellbeing. We urge the society to turn away from market forces and walk on the path of humanity.

In the recent times, both at the Centre and State, all parties have been speaking of development. They outdo each other in promises of greater development. We the common people also aspire for the development of our country, our state. But we propose a development that is different from what it is now. Planes, electronic equipment, malls brimming with consumer goods, flyovers, IT-BT companies are on a steady rise. The share market is booming. The millionaires are adding more millions and are flaunting more acquisitions. Could we call this development? Development according to us is the social-political-economical progress of the masses. It also means the economic stability of the state, it also means bridging the chasm between regions, projects that protect ecology and respect the democratic rights of the people. But democracy is heading in which direction? In the last ten years, multimillionaires are on the rise, among the ten richest people in the world, Indians are also getting included, and at the same time farmer suicides are on the rise. In many states, people are dying of hunger. In the name of developmental programmes, tribals have been evacuated from their traditional settlements. Giant multinational corporations and big capitalists are acquiring thousands of acres of land.

What kind of development do we aspire for?

As discussed in the previous chapter, when the majority is in distress, the democratic system must have plans that are in favour of the masses. It must be ensured that in this country with super rich people, the masses mustn't die of hunger. It must ensure that wealth doesn't get concentrated in a few. But the brand of development adopted by our States is making the rich, super rich. It is making deeper divides

between the rural and urban, small towns and large cities, between plush localities and slums, and also between the various parts of the state. Cities are becoming unlivable with no scope for stress-free movement. With dense traffic, driving peacefully from one place to the other is unthinkable. And as a solution to this, roads are being widened, flyovers are being built. But if inequality is not addressed, nothing will solve the problem; not even the widening of roads and not even the mono rail.

Does this kind of development ensure the state's economic self-sufficiency? No. All states have come to accept globalization as handed over by the imperialistic forces. They have signed the charter of demands put forth by IMF and the World Bank. They are part of WTO. The substance of all this is that every foreign company now has a free way in entering any part of the country at its will. It also means the step by step disengagement of the government from social responsibility; spending less and less money on social purposes; and to divert these funds in providing basic facilities to expand the market. Uniformly, all state governments and the centre have taken to this. Also, the government is stepping back from areas of water, electricity, banking, education, health, food, transport and communication. In each of these sectors, there's now a big presence of private players. Public services are becoming expensive. In essence, most governments now adopt an unabashed policy of protecting the interests of Indian and foreign multinationals, thereby becoming the votaries of globalization. Instead of protesting against such policies, all the parties have become advocates of these policies and are cheating the public. They no longer safeguard the interest of small industrialists but strengthen the fists of Marwadis and Baniyas so that they can exercise a greater stranglehold on the masses.

In the petroleum industry, Shell and Reliance are expanding. Huge players like Reliance and Birla are making in roads even into petty businesses. Lakhs of small industries in the state are sick. In total, neither small industries nor small businesses are protected. Congress that speaks of Gandhism, BJP that speaks of patriotism, and Janata Dal that speaks of the farmer's interest, all of them are busy serving international corporations.

Demands of the people

We strongly condemn this model of development that is breeding inequalities and imbalances, its lack of concern for the well being of its people, and its apathy towards ecological issues and democratic principles. It is also pushing the masses into greater suffering and strengthening the hands of the rich and the anti-social. True development is that which uplifts the poor and the discriminated and is certainly not marked by planes, malls, foreign cars, big bungalows and private aircrafts. The policies of the government must undergo a sea change. It must aim for uniform development; it must protect the local economy, must be environment friendly and must have the highest regard for people's voice. They must come out of the clutches of globalization that gobbles up the powerless and weak. They must put an end to privatization which is anti-people. They must come out of WTO. The share of the government in public sectors must increase. And the resources of the State and the government must be directed towards its people. There must be a check on the wealth expansion of the rich.

People's demands

Farmers in crisis

Farmers across the nation who are unable to withstand the agrarian crisis enveloping them from all sides are committing suicide in thousands. There perhaps is nothing more shameful for a nation than this state of affairs. While the governments – at the Centre and the State – have announced loan waivers (albeit conditionally), they have not come to the rescue of the majority. Successive governments, as part of their liberalization agenda, have forced nationalized banks to hanker only after profit and abandon their commitment to provide loans to the poor and the farmers, leading the latter to rely increasingly on private lenders and usurers. An NSS survey finds that 87% of the smallest and 61% of the middle-level farmers have never received loans from nationalized banks. The announced waivers are therefore almost meaningless. Instead of creating a situation that makes loans/waivers redundant through fair and scientific minimum crop prices, bringing down input costs and providing access to suitable markets, governments take the easy, short-term but saleable measure of loan waivers. We have not forgotten that the BJP, which is now conducting farmers' conventions by the score, had legislated the most anti-farmer, pro-MNC laws and that its Sangh Parivar affiliates had never taken up campaigns on our behalf even if 99 % of the farmers' committing suicide happened to be 'Hindus'.

While land reforms have brought on some progressive changes, it has left untouched crores of agriculture-dependant families and land continues to be owned by those who have nothing to do with farming. To top it, now the government is

itself in the name of national interest, snatching away our land to give it to big companies. This must end.

People's Demands

- Fix scientific price for all crops, provide access to suitable markets
- For this term, sugarcane must be given Rs 1500 and paddy Rs 1100
- Government must enact a comprehensive law on farm loans. At least 90 % of agricultural loans must come from agricultural sources.
- Anti-farmer water-use, electricity and crop regulations legislated in tune with demands of globalization must be rolled back.
- Provide free electricity till the farming community recovers completely. Ensure electricity supply for the same amount of time and of the same quality as given to urban areas.
- Small irrigation projects must be taken up in unirrigated areas. Efforts to increase the water table must be taken up urgently.
- Special studies must be conducted on organic and natural farming. Liberal subsidies to ensure self-dependency of farmers.
- Ban contract and corporate farming.
- Increase minimum wages under the rural employment guarantee scheme.
- Land sealing must be relooked at benefiting the poor farmers. All landless and those owing less than a hectare must be given at least one hectare. The unauthorized cultivators must get land patta within one year.

All these are easily done if only the illegal riches of the miners and liquor lords is confiscated and an act legislating a sealing on accumulation is passed.

Urban poor and the slum dwellers: Darkness beneath the light

Around 8% of the State's population (40 lakhs) lives in slums making up about 25% of our urban population. They have remained without the basic necessities of drinking water, sanitation and shelter for the last 60 years. Last 20 years of liberalization has only worsened their condition. Withdrawing its welfarist commitment, the government is now charging them to even construct toilets. It has taken back all the housing schemes, while with the Rs 40,000 it gives no house can be constructed. The footpath vendors face eviction in the name of beautification.

When the congress did little in 40 years, JDS reneged on a promised made regarding giving title deeds. Yediyurappa gave an allocation less than that he gave the mathas. We have already stopped the sangh parivar units from vitiating the slum kids with their communal poison, we have also become wiser about being used as foot soldiers for their communal riots.

People's demands

- New housing policy for slum dwellers; Minimum of Rs 1 lakh for house construction; Making access to drinking water compulsory on the local body.
- Provide title deeds to dwellers of both recognized and unrecognized slums. Allocate 10% of land of all government and private localities to the slum dwellers.
- 18% of local body funds for slum dwellers and bringing them under Yashaswini.

- Slum dwellers must get a quota in all welfare schemes and disbursed through a single window mechanism. Separate ministry needs to be set up.
- Cut-off date for recognizing slums must be done away with.

If only the government were to decide on whose behalf they function, property of the innumerable landgrabbers can be confiscated and used for our welfare.

Workers

Agrarian crisis is pushing a great number of people into the urban labour population. But liberalization has meant that none have secure employment opportunities. Weaving is in complete shambles while most of the new jobs are unorganized and have little protection and stability. The industry owners and contractors abuse our insecurity and take away even the basic facilities and labour laws such as work hour restrictions, leave and health entitlements, PF etc.

Demands:

- Regularize all contract workers. Make all daily wagers permanent. Labour reforms must be labour friendly.
- Increase minimum wage and 8 hour work rule must be stringently enforced.
- Government must continue to run the industries it owns or else hand them over to worker cooperatives.
- Ensure security of employment, welfare endowments and health insurance for unorganized workers.
- Improve working conditions in all sectors, including sanitation, and implement minimum wages regulations.

Women

Women take on the dual load of working within and outside homes but own meager resources. Dalit and minority women are victims of caste and communal discrimination and violence. Even as dowry gobbles up one woman every 50 minutes, the many laws arising out of decades of struggle remain ineffective due to the stagnant value system. Self-help groups that have brought a modicum of economic power and voice to the women are now put to use by politicians for their own games. The women's reservation Bill still hangs fire. Imagine if we were to demand 50% quota! BJP and its Pariwar affiliates have always upheld the anti-woman Manuvada and thereby attack Dalit and minority women.

Demands:

- Equal rights over property and power, and equal pay for equal work.
- Impart gender sensitivity to the state and the judiciary; sensitise society.
- Provide at least 33% reservation to women in all fields along with internal reservation for dalit, OBC and minority women.
- Meet the longstanding demands of the Anganwadi workers.

The Minorities: Insecure insiders

While contributing equally to the development and wealth of the nation, the minorities have remained socially and economically backward, a fact now made most eloquently by the Sachar Committee. To top it, the Sangh Pariwar has intensified its vicious campaign against them. But questioning their commitment to the nation can only further alienate the minorities. Yet, if we thought it was the government's responsibility to contain the communal forces, BJP in Karnataka is now talking of replicating the Gujarat model

here. Calling everyone to defeat BJP in this election, we also warn the other political parties to align with BJP. We demand that they all join the fight against communalization.

Demands:

- Take cognizance of the Sachar and Mishra Committees Reports; ensure separate reservation for the minorities.
- Put down communalizing forces and groups, provide security to the minorities, and compensate victims of communal riots.
- Protect and develop minority languages and culture.

Small traders drowning in corporate tsunami

Studies point to the deep damage corporate retailing brings in. once they establish their monopoly, they will also exploit the consumers. They will also intensify the agrarian crisis through corporate farming. Now with the amendment of the APMC Act, the government is furthering the interests of the big players. The Bania party, BJP, will only work for the interest of the big industries and traders.

Demands:

- Ban entry of the corporate houses into retail trade.
- Stop harassment of street vendors in the name of beautification.
- Provide easy-term loans for small traders.

Tribals and their forests

Tribals have taken the worst of the development model the governments have followed. Being the most displaced, any resistance on their part is brutally quelled labeling them as Naxals.

Demands:

- Sovereignty over forests must remain with the forest dwellers.

- No displacement under any pretext.
- No project without their explicit consent.

Dalits and Backward Castes

The socio-economic condition of the dalits and backward castes continue to be inhuman. Any mobilization and resistance from them are put down viciously with active connivance of state machinery. While a middle class has been created among us, liberalization has eroded whatever small progress we had made with reservations losing its significance. The communal forces are using us as foot soldiers in attacks on minorities and leave us to take the brunt of state and judicial action. They also strive to make us participate in denigrating ourselves by celebrating Brahminism, the very ideology that has dehumanized us all along. We realize that majority communalism is not only an enemy of the minorities but also of Dalits and backward castes.

Demands:

- Implement reservation in private sector.
- Ensure speedy justice in cases of atrocities on Dalits.
- Stop the spread of communal venom.
- Reservation in higher education and employment must be properly implemented, and designs to sabotage them must be sternly dealt with.

Fisherpeople and the coastal region in the net of vested interests

Many anti-people projects such as the Kaiga nuclear plant, Nagarjuna thermal power plant, many SEZs and resorts are threatening to destroy the life and culture of the coastal people. Deep sea fishing is compromising the very future of the fisher communities. Hindu communal organizations growing like

poisonous weed have diverted people's attention from such life threatening projects and pitted one against the other.

- Abandon the anti-people projects along the coast.
- Cancel permits given to national and international behemoths to undertake fishing.
- Reformulate the CRZ Act.
- Contain the growth of the communal weed.

Regional imbalance

Regional imbalances have been a historical fact. But successive governments post-(State) unification have only worsened it leading groups in north Karnataka to demand a separate state.

Demands:

- Implement recommendations of Nanjundappa Committee.
- Examine the demands of north Karnataka sympathetically and take steps to remove discrimination.

Food, shelter, health and education: Luxuries?

Even 60 years of independence have not ensured that basic necessities of the majority are met. Liberalization has only made our situation worse. Governments formed by any and every political party has unabashedly worked towards taking away the public distribution system (PDS).

- All poor must get BPL cards. The PDS grants must be doubled. Loopholes must be plugged.

While the real estate goons are unrestrainedly plundering Bangalore, governments have all along mentioned legal

hurdles to give land pattas to its poor residents. Schemes like Ashraya have only fattened the corrupt contractors.

- Entitlement of the houses people stay in must be transferred to them immediately. Every homeless family must be given a house.

In a stratified society such as ours, the government cannot run away from ensuring equal access to quality education and health facilities. But the government is washing its hands off from even primary education. This year tenders have been called to take over 2000 primary schools. Private universities are allowed to set up shops, government universities now have payment seats.

- Stop private take over of government schools. Nationalize all primary and high schools, and abolish all alternative education boards. A common educational system must be framed. Grants to higher education must increase.
- Quality of government schools and colleges must improve. Kannada and Urdu schools must not be allowed to wither away. Appoint Kannada teachers in Urdu schools.
- Grants to Social Welfare and Backward Classes Departments hostels should increase to Rs. 800. Number of hostels must go up.
- Abolish payment seats in higher education. Reduce fees.
- Universities must work with research institutions and not with industries.
- Dalit, backward class, rural and minority students must have reservation in all forms of education.
- Akshara Dasoha project must continue but not privatized.

Health facilities are a mess with even the government hospitals contracting out work. Sidelining all alternative medical systems, only the imperialist controlled allopathy is being encouraged.

- Establish a fee control mechanism governing private hospitals.
- Encourage scientific practices found in alternative medical systems.

Our land, water, language, culture in jeopardy

Our rich culture, built on the works and vision of the valorous men and women, poets and philosophers drawn from all castes and communities, is under threat, both from within and without. The many linguistic and border disputes created by unthinking and mischievous government committees have now pitted one linguistic group against another. Industries and factories owned by Kannadigas have been systematically sidelined. Encouraging the so-called god's language, Sanskrit, and national language, Hindi, languages of the people, Kannada, Kodava, Tulu and Urdu are made to face hostility, particularly from the Sangh Pariwar camp.

- Kannada must be the prime language in Karnataka. End the domination of English-Hindi-Sanskrit. Tulu, Kodava and Urdu languages must be developed and prioritized.
- All of Karnataka to be galvanized to fight against the Centre in finding a lasting solution to the border and water disputes.
- Resist the spread of influence of the sanathana and western cultures.

Corruption, price rise: robbing the people in broad daylight

Corruption has overcome its shame face and has become legitimate. This has meant that the big traders are left free to hoard and create artificial inflation and price rise. All essential commodities have become more expensive even as corporate houses are given tax holidays.

- Set up people's committees involving honest public personalities authorised to check corruption.
- Intervene urgently to check inflation.
- Stop privatizing electricity and water supply, and transport. Bring down their rates at least by 30%.
- Abolish VAT.

Support people's struggle and stop anti-people projects

Apart from the demands listed above we now like to mention many others that have been causes of struggle for some time. We demand that your party take a public stand on these issues and initiate due action.

- Abandon all SEZs.
- Drop Chamalapura and Nagarjuna power projects.
- Close down mines in places like Sandur and Belikeri. Take steps to confiscate the unethical money and property these miners have made.
- Drop all national part projects and stop driving tribals out of forests.
- Bababudangiri must continue to exist as a place of religious harmony. Contain designs of the Sangh Pariwar to convert it into a communal space.

- Stop corrupting and eroding PDS. Provide ration cards to all the poor and provide essential commodities through ration cards.
- Investigate police atrocities on political activists, and withdraw cases foisted on them.
- Take punitive action fake encounters and cases of lockup deaths. Release people kept under illegal detentions.

Defeat communal BJP

Warn parties which
are sidelining
people's issues

Demand the implementation
of People's Manifesto

People's Alliance
for Democracy



People's Manifesto