

Interview with comrade Sonu, member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of India (Maoist). According to press reports aka Mallojula Koteswara Rao and responsible for the Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee.

According to the authorized transcript.

Wherever comrades Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha have gone, the comrades at the place first of all warmly welcomed them and an introduction has taken place.

Dandakaranya includes Andhra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Maharashtra villages and forest in the area covering the borders of these 4 states that comprise Dandakaranya. The name Dandakaranya was not given by the Party. This name in history can be traced to the myths. It is said (in the Ramayana) that Ram stayed in the Dandakaranya forest during his forest exile. At present in Dandakaranya, there are 10 Divisions of the Party that are working. As of now, the party is expanding outside Dandakaranya, for instance Manpur and Mainpur divisions. Till 2004 it was only old Bastar and Gadchiroli that came under the struggle areas. Later Manpur and Minepur added. For easier coordination, the Bastar area divided into 6 divisions, while Gadchiroli divided into 2 divisions. These along with Manpur and Minepur, form the total 10 divisions. In the entire Dandakaranya area, it is the Koya, Dorla tribes who are the predominant adivasi communities. Others comprise Halbi, Batra and the Pradhan. Some dalit sections as well as the Mahar community of Maharashtra also falls under this area. Other than this there are some non-adivasi communities like Sahu. The Koya and Dorla communities are together referred to as Gonds. That is why the name Gondvana. The total Gond population covering parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa amounts to 70 lakhs (7,000,000). Here when we are working 10 divisions of Dandakaranya, it covers a total of 45-50 lakhs (4,500,000 to 5,000,000) population approximately. Spread over 60 thousand square kilometers approximately the movement is going on.

Here people from before Christ itself throughout its history have been rebellious and fighting people. In history, even before the British, and of course during colonial times, these people fought in several massive uprisings. From 1825 to 1964 the people rebelled 10 to 11 times under various leaderships. In 1964 the people of Bastar under their Raja struggled for the last time against the Nehru regime. And then after a 10-15 years of lull, we entered this area in the early 1980s. Throughout its history, the people of this area have fought against exploitation for their land and livelihood. They have had a democratic living in accordance with the tribal tradition that prevailed in India.

Here, after coming in 1980, the history of the early years of the party have been covered adequately by Comrade Murali. In 1989, a state wide Adivasi peasant organisation started in Dandakaranya in the shape of Dandakaramnya Adivasi Mazdor Kisan Sangh. Under this organisation, men and women fought for land rights and particularly the landless peasants were consolidated under the slogan – land to the tillers. At present it reached near about one lakh membership. There after in 1991 the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan was formed as a women's organisation for the purpose of emancipation of women. At present it has one lakh (100,000) membership. And by now, we have

emerged as the most important Party in Dandakaranya. In 2004, the Chaitana Natya Manch was started. Now it reached more than 10,000 membership. I think it is the biggest revolutionary writers and artists organisation in India.

We have attempted to consolidate the masses here and have produced great results. As the people here had a long history of oppression under the state's forest department and the tribal chiefs – they naturally showed interest. Initially however it took some time for the people to built trust on the Party. But eventually once that was gained, there was great success. The first struggle launched in this area, was against the forest department, the primary problem being of the land. The forest department had enormous amounts of land under its authority. Initially, in spite of the presence of contradiction between the tribal head and the people, the people hesitated to say anything about it, as this did not have confidence on the party. They feared that is the party leaves they would have face the brunt of the chief's revenge. Therefore in the initial years, we took the entire adivasi population versus the forest department and as they observed our sincerity and sacrifice in the struggle against the state, then the people consequently told us of their internal contradiction. Due to land problem, being the most serious one, it had taken most seriously by the party. There is almost no land less peasantry here today, however initially there were in considerable number. Three lakh (300,000) acres of forest land were won over. So the first struggle within the village was launched around the land movement only. The tribal chiefs had a lot of land under their power. But once that was acquired along with the forest land, the standard of living in this area had an upward turn. In the initial years, there was dirth of food as well. Now they are getting food two times a day and also possess land. The struggle against the forest department was combined with the struggle against the tribal chiefs.

But state repression was also increasing simultaneously. A stage had come by then when the villagers had confident that Dandakaramnya Adivasi Mazdor Kisan Sangh was their own organisation. Every villager participated in it in the form of a tradition. The old tradition of collective participation of the Adivasi was exploited by the party in its initial years for the purpose of the revolution. Now that they themselves started understanding the advantages of organisation and the party it raised the consciousness level of the people to the extent that they could clearly demarcate the contradiction between the people and the chiefs as well as the people and the state. So, the alignment also was very clear to them. The chiefs sided with the state, while the party and people came together.

By this time, there was the consciousness among the people, that if they needed to maintain their right over the land, then they would have to fight. Or else, the state and the chiefs would seize no opportunity to grab it back. So the party as well clearly gave the direction that if you organise yourself in armed only then you will be able keep your right.

It was around the same time, that the first Jan Jagaran started in 1990-91 and this was hardly a coincidence. As the tribal chiefs lost their land as well as their traditional status, the Dandakaramnya Adivasi Mazdor Kisan Sangh was steadily replacing them. So naturally, the state and chiefs colluded in organising the first white terror campaign in 1990-91 in the form of Jan Jagaran. At the same time, this was the time of the good increase in the recruitment for the party which shows that all these developments were related.

So, this is an crucial period in the history of Dandakaranya movement. The white terror had started in 1990-91. The Dandakaranya had also reached the Zonal level peasant and women's organisations

and recruitment in the form of people's militia were on the rise. Just after a year in 1991, serious repression started in Maharashtra. Between 1991-1994 dozens were martyred in the undeclared war in Gadchiroli and Bastar.

The state most obviously was not ready to tolerate the people's movement. It was at this time, the party took the decision to fight against the state. It is since then, that action against the state forces started being taken. In 1987, actions against the state started in Andhra Pradesh. By 1991 it had started in Dandakaranya. A guerrilla zone started being developed. This is also the same time that the party had planned to expand again and accordingly in 1989, 15-20 comrades were sent into Central India. By 1995 when the Party's 2nd Conference was held, the development of Party in Dandakaranya in terms of recruitment, militia as well as ambushes had expanded. The traditional chiefs had been more or less suppressed and by now all village problems were being referred to the Dandakaramnya Adivasi Mazdor Kisan Sangh. This was a form of power transfer in clearest terms. Both the traditional chieftains and the government Panchayat system were losing ground. Even the patwaris (village level land record officer) stopped coming to village for revenue collection. The only active channel by now was the Dandakaramnya Adivasi Mazdor Kisan Sangh. The Party observed a power vacuum. A new power has to seize the state.

By 1994, the decision to create people's power organs was formally taken. And it was past 1995 the All India Special Conference was held. Party Unity had sent a fraternal delegation. The Party also ratified the decision of building power organs. By 1996, the work for building a new people's power was on its way. There was a rapid increase in the speed of agricultural development activities for the agricultural people. The Janathana Circar at that time, thereby concentrated in the main problem in this area i.e., extremely the backward agriculture. Decision was taken to concentrate on the development of agriculture because, in the entire Bastar and Gadchiroli region, only 2% of the land was irrigated as per government records. Irrigation tanks were started being built at the village level leaving to agricultural development. This also led to a new found unity among the people. Along with this, there was a new phenomena in the form of the development of a cooperative system. 3-4 families started ploughing together. Even while building houses or doing other works, cooperative teams of 11 members emerged. Other than agricultural activities, these work teams started participating in other collective works like the collection of the fire wood and other 10-12 works.

These work teams at the level of peasantry, were built from the class perspective. Putting the poorer peasant families along with the rich peasantry would have meant by the time they ploughed their own land, the monsoon would be gone. The cooperative system as it emerged, led to the development of a feeling of collectivity and unity. There was land now in hand along with there was irrigation which led to for the betterment in the standard of living. Recruitment also multiplied simultaneously.

As people's power consolidated, again, the state reacted with a second white terror campaign the name of Jan Jagaran campaign. Mahendra Karma, whose father was a British collaborator as well as a big landlord, led the first white terror campaign in 1990-91 and this time he again led it in 1997. As Lenin had correctly pointed out, as the power recedes, from the power of old feudal lords, they strike back with ten times more power and also in terms of a class enemy. This is what we clearly witnessed here.

In 2001, on the 9th Party Congress along with Party Unity, a conceptual development was arrived in the party about base areas and building the people's army. After a thorough review, the decision was taken let us build guerrilla bases. With the same perspective already in December 2nd 2000 the People's guerrilla Army had been formed. Since 2001, the first base area construction had to be analysed in more concrete terms. This was discussed and debated thoroughly. Accordingly within the guerrilla zones, guerrilla bases began to build. Therefore, concrete shape was now finally being given to the construction of people's power in accordance with the terrain and available support of mass base. 500 to 3000 people in the villages were now being constituted into Revolutionary People's Committees. The understanding was formulated that without army people cannot build power. People's army and people's power were linked. This developed understanding helped us a lot in working towards both the development of the army and the development of people's power. 2 or 3 spots were selected for guerrilla bases in each division, and in this shape 10-12 spots were concentrated upon to form the guerrilla bases. Maad forms the Central guerrilla Base.

After this decision was taken, work started towards that direction. The first step was to create village level Revolutionary People's Committees. The second step was to create Area Revolutionary People's Committees over the selected guerrilla bases in each division. By 2004 December, the first Area Revolutionary People's Committee was built. And by 2005 February, the 2nd Area Revolutionary People's Committee was formed. From 2005 onwards, till 2008 all the spots were covered by Area Revolutionary People's Committees.

The party decision was to create minimum 3 Area Revolutionary People's Committees in each division which is under process. Now divisional governments are also built. The first divisional government was formed in 2007 March. During the initial stage of guerrilla bases, the corresponding military formation was platoons. Now with the development of divisional circars, Companies were formed at military level. To intensify this process, we have made Zonal Level Circar Preparatory Committee. Once this is made, the zonal level circar will be in place and alongside in terms of military development, battalion are being built. The first battalion was formed on August 10, 2009.

At the village level, for the Janathana Circar, there is adult franchise. After that at higher levels, there is representative election. And the same process goes up to the Zonal level council. Considering the Dandakaranya area was predominantly inhabited by adivasi people with limited experience in new governance, the first workshop for this purpose was organised in February 2008. It was an extremely productive endeavour as a free exchange of experiences and opinions to be taken for both the party as well as the people could take place. On the other side, as the higher level of people's government is being formed.

The call for boycott of parliamentary election is now being more actively undertaken. In the 2008 November, Chhattisgarh Assembly Election, in the 2009 April, 15th Lok Sabha Election and in the 2009 October Maharashtra Assembly Election, we have observed the steady development under the leadership of the people's government of active and collective boycott of election by the people. All the Revolutionary People's Committees called public meetings in their villages and told the people that they have been electing their own government, how can they elect another government outside at the same time? So, entire population with the concrete consciousness have boycotted the bourgeois parliamentary elections.

Alongside these people's governments the people's militia have also developing steadily with the purpose of protecting the people's government. Our military strength has also been increasing and consequently the para military forces that during every election try to pressurise and threaten the masses have been effectively registered by the People's Liberation guerrilla Army and the militia lately. In the entire Bastar struggle area there are only been 2-5% polling. For instance, in Gogonda, there were 700 voters and 1000 paramilitary posted during election. As the bourgeois media itself showed, even after such arrangements there were only 10 votes cast, that too after 3rd time repolling which completely exposes the irrelevance of the bourgeois parliamentary elections to the people of this area.

As people's government coming to power, alongside we are rejecting bourgeois parliamentary elections. This is the only place outside the Kashmir, where the very low polling was held and election boycott was so successful and this had definitely threatened the state.

In terms of recruitment too, People's Liberation guerrilla Army has been taking recruitment campaign from 2001. Now however with the coming of the Janathana Circar, the duty of recruitment has been handed over to the Revolutionary People's Committees, because the people's army is a responsibility of the people's government. Now, encouragement is being given at the village level to join the people's army. For instance 2008 December, in Gangalur the Area Revolutionary People's Committee of this area conducted two public meetings at two different places attended by more than 10 thousand people. From the dias itself, the Area Revolutionary People's Committee president gave a call for recruitment into the People's Liberation guerrilla Army. From these two public meetings alone, near about 100 youth volunteered to join the People's Liberation guerrilla Army and the party after scanning recruited 60-65 members from here.

All developments in this region of Dandakaranya is now the responsibility of the people's government, i.e., the Janathana Circar, which is concentrating and dealing with the problems of the people. The weakening of the bourgeois parliamentary government is being simultaneously replaced by the strengthening of the people's government. The Revolutionary People's Committees originally had 7 departments, later two more departments in the form of trade and industry and public relations were added. We are also trying to ensure women's participation in people's government with the idea of ensuring 50% share for women in governance. We are still working on this area and as of now there has been not much progress possible. We are working towards expanding it. Each department in the Revolutionary People's Committees is working in different field. Mainly, the agricultural department, the education and cultural department and the medical department are working most effectively for development. Now we are not taking taxes from the people at this stage. The middle and petty-bourgeoisie in accordance with the 4-class alliance are being made to pay taxes for agricultural development, medical as well as building of schools, we are at present depending on the fund collection from the people which is accumulated minimum shares from agricultural production and forest production. Particularly in terms of defence department, working for the people's militia, providing it with basic defence material, like flash light, gun powder, bows and arrows etc. the people's government is taking responsibility. We are all in a state of war. So for the defence of the people and protection of Janatana Circar we are concentrating on the defence department and the militia.

As the Mukhia's traditional privileges and the government's panchayat system are receding alongside the people's power is expanding. A clash between the two powers is inevitable. Mahendra Karma in 1997 directly aligned himself with the village chiefs with full state backing. In this campaign of white terror, many local comrades were tortured, many houses were burnt and people were threatened to surrender by giving open threat calls. One of our local comrades, for instance had been killed publicly in front of the public meeting, creating an atmosphere of terror.

We also had developed a military force even at the level of squads and took actions against the people's enemy. Masa of village Vedire was a cruel and notorious village chief and he was eliminated as the people's enemy. In this way selected people have been killed which made others hesitant while many surrendered in front of the people. This phase continued from 6-8 months.

Similarly again in 1997, the second white terror campaign was launched by the reactionary forces with full state protection. Again, selected people were punished while others were produced in front of the people, where many surrendered.

However the attack that started on 5th June 2005, in the name of Salva Judum was qualitatively different both in extent and scope from the last two white terror campaigns. While the two janjagarans had been largely organised at a local level, this one was the product of a coordinated planning from the local through the state, to the Central level. Both the state police and central para military forces along with the local level Salva Judum gangs were unleashed on the people with much more long term perspective. The development and strengthening of the people's movement since 2004 after the party's merger made it the primary target of the state and it was at this time that Manmohan Singh identified the Maoist party as the single largest danger in the country. Salva Judum therefore was a completely pre-meditated, coordinated and planned assault to crush the rising people's power.

From the 5th of June till December 2005, the terror campaign was on peak. Particularly the two blocs of Bhairamgad and Bijapur were selected for maximum concentration of terror and in the whole process at least 644 villages were destroyed. As per government records 300 thousand people disappeared. Only 60 thousand were accounted for who had been kept in 33 concentration camps or what they call relief camps while what happen to the rest the government still does not account for. Majority people are with us. A destructive campaign was undertaken when the people who have forced into the camps led a miserable life, while the villagers who dared to return to their own villages still largely live in jungles as the fascist repression in the form of indiscriminate loots, killings and rapes continued.

Initially when we use to talk about fascism people could not understand or appreciate what it really meant. But after Salva Judum and the experience of the repression, they realised what fascism was. The party also tried to counter the terror campaign and 2006 January onwards a concrete planned campaign against Salva Judum was taken up in which the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army started targeting the reactionary forces in a planned shape. Alongside this a lot of positive developments started countrywide as the democratic sections of people cooperated to a large extent in this phase. While the party also continued its campaign against Salva Judum, the state propaganda of projecting Salva Judum as an independent and spontaneous movement of the people, of the nature of democratic revolution had been thoroughly exposed.

Salva Judum for a long time, was being projected by state as a effective mean for development against Naxalism. And this was challenged successfully throughout the nation. Here, it was a battle for Adivasis survival. The party clearly called the people to join the militia for survival. And correct structure emerged in the shape of the Koya Bhoomkal Militia. It was inaugurated on 10th February 2006 with the spirit of the Bhoomkal uprising of 1910. Thousands join in the militia to fight for life and existence against Judum. The people, the People's Liberation guerrilla Army, the party, the mass organisations and the campaigns in the national and international levels came together in the shape of a big movement for which the party is grateful to the democratic forces of the country. Finally the existence of Salva Judum was officially halted by May-June 2006.

Salva Judum was the product of a state, that was eager to loot the natural resources of this region. With the Bharatiya Janbata Party in power in 2004, by 2005 hundreds of Memoranda of Understanding had been signed. The Texas Power Generation Company had invested for instance 5000 crores (50,000,000,000 in Chattisghad. In Lohandiguda, Tata had acquired enormous lands and so did Jindal in Bansi. Ultimately, it was the question of existence for the adivasi community and as experience shows the Bailadilla mines that had started as early as 1970, was profiting Japan while continuously hampering adivasi life and culture. This position for acquiring natural resources is the gravest danger haunting the adivasi communities. Manmohan Singh calls the Maoists as the biggest danger, but the real threat for existence is being faced by the adivasis and natural resources. That is why people came in large numbers, resisted Salva Judum, attacked the forces and people as far as Nagaland and Mizoram protested the deployment of their forces like Naga battalion, Mizo battalion in this area.

What we see in 2007 and 2008 is a demoralising of the state forces. And by 2009 October, Chidambaram and Mahendra Karma and other architects of Salva Judum had to finally give public statement annulling Salva Judum. But as the terror campaign failed, again the state started mobilising its repressive resources and another wave of intensification of the assault on the people is now being seen in the form of operation green hunt. In Salva Judum we saw 18-20000 forces being deployed. Today there are nearly 100 thousand security forces being unleashed on the people. The Special Police Officers of the Salva Judum time are now being converted into Koya Commandos. And so Operation Green Hunt is nothing but a further more intensified extension of Salva Judum. Such terror campaigns are not unique in Dandakaranya, in Jharkhand and Bihar too there is the Sendra.

So from Lalgad to Surjagad, this entire adivasi belt with all its wealth and natural resources, though being projected as the Red Corridor is in reality a mineral corridor. And as they are threatened by the rising people's power in this region they are launching one offensive after another and after the failure of Salva Judum now we see the Operation Green Hunt. To conclude, white terror had started in 1990-91 after which we decided to form people's government which was followed by the 2nd white terror in 1997. And after this, we gave concrete shape to the people's power by consolidating the Revolutionary People's Committees. Then came Salva Judum and since then, we gave spread into area level and through all these years, militarily we have moved from platoons through companies, moving towards battalion formation.

On the question of Women :

In the adivasi tradition, women just like in plains, faced great pressure. Though the penetration of the Hindu traditional forces, have not been complete, still oppressive practices prevail. Women in many areas here are for instance, not even allowed to wear a blouse after marriage. There was also practice of godna or mars on the body. But since the spread of the movement, the new generation had stopped such practices. Overall one can see that women work more than their male counterparts. They not only help in ploughing but also manage cooking, looking after the baby, collecting Jungle products, and hence their participation and support is much higher. There are evil traditions and social evils like forced marriage that still prevail.

In some areas the practice of Gotul continued till the end of the last century where the youth in the evening also engage in open sex. As the party started work in this area, in 1986 different women's organisations started being built in this area. In 1991, the Divisional level Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangams came into being and considering that the women in this area had been the most oppressed section in society, they too were interested and took part. In the People's Liberation guerrilla Army and the party, there already is 40% women participation. Along with the Daktari Millath of Kashmir, the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangam with more than 100 thousand membership is one of the biggest militant mass organisations in the country. As the women started resting their faith on the party, the movement started towards political power for women. Such practices like forceful marriage have at least been stopped and today one may say that the women are living with dignity and they are aware that if there is any problem there is the party and the People's Liberation guerrilla Army they can approach. Along with these great changes, now there is work towards giving more political power also.

Exploiting women and sexual assault on them has been used as a tool that the reactionaries and security forces for repression. But the women have emerged in a revolutionary role, braving all such offensive. They have not only sent their sons and daughters into the party and worked hard at home to manage the family but have also actively participated in the party's work and other struggles.

Q: There are very old traditions that requires to be handled very delicately even if there are evil influences. How do you handle traditions without destroying their autonomous identity?

A: It is very important question and the party whenever it has faced such problem, has reviewed it self-critically and have immediately asked for apology from the people. For instance, there is a culture of keeping women outside the village during the period of menstruation. The women in the village Kranitikari Adivasi Mahila Sangam decided that they should be made to stay inside the village. This angered the people because of which the Kranitikari Adivasi Mahila Sangam immediately self-reflected on the issue. Whenever we have learnt from our mistakes, we have asked for apology.

In terms of the Gotul sex, I would say that there are tribal traditions or culture that in the 21st century have not remained in its pristine and pure form. We must acknowledge the fact that market penetration and subsequent exploitation have also been a reality. In today's times, taking advantage of tribal tradition, outsiders often exploit the women and there have been cases of women becoming pregnant while the stranger took no responsibility. With outside influence, pure traditions of the adivasis have also taken aberrant forms. Thousands of women came out in protest. And there were rallies of around 5000 women protesting this tradition. Party immediately went in, debated and discussed the issue and stopped the practice. So we have to handle tradition with patience at the level of consciousness and education.

For example, there is a tradition here, of giving importance to surnames. Intra surname marriage is strictly prohibited as they consider the same goddess. This is largely similar to Engel's study of African tribes. Here a brotherly feeling immediately is struck if two Madaavis meet. Within the party there had emerged a difficult situation. Two comrades with the same surname had fallen in love. We consulted the Chinese constitution which has largely similar conditions of ours and found that it could be allowed after a gap of five generations. But we were not consolidated enough and nor was China's context similar to ours today neither did we have Revolutionary People's Committees at that time. It was a troublesome episode as it could have alienated the masses as well. We approached the whole party and the people and on the basis of the opinion, we did not support.

This area also had the tradition of spending frivolously and recklessly at marriage as it was related to status. This led to wasteful expenditure and financial ruin. So the party directed that instead of continuing the celebrations for two to three days families would be required to wrap it up in one day. Then again, for every food item, whether it is vegetable, makai or mahua, the adivasis at the practice for organising festivities. This was hampering production relation and so the party called together all the priests in the area and asked for their suggestion as to how to tackle the issue. The traditional priests immediately cooperated and suggested six main festivals annually. Then again, the traditional medical knowledge that had been enmeshed in superstitious practices and the various medicinal herbs are today being exploited to make a rich knowledge base by the medical department of the Janathana Circar. We must keep in mind that people have to be taken into confidence and this is only possible through education and consciousness, not by force.

Q: If the war is inevitable, i.e., if the state wants the mineral resources and wishes to crush the people's power, then what is the role that the civil liberties organisations that have been trying to push the state back from the war?

A: The Civil Liberties organisations had reached great heights, particularly after the emergency and since 1977 onwards they have played a great role in this country. But as the movement has been changing its character in this country over the years, there have been rapid development in terms of the people's struggle and the state repression. In order to effectively intervene and meaningful contribute to today's changed situation in the country, the civil liberty groups too in their opinions and ideas has to catch up with the changing developments. We also need to work to a great extent among them to meet this end. Now an important issue is taking place in the democratic circles. The question is about the development. The genuine democrats are with people's development but the rest are with imperialist development or with the ruling classes. In my view they are pseudo democrats. Now I fully hope that our movement will win the real democrats if we do all the things in the proper way. And this is the testing period to themselves also. Who raises their consciousness they will stand with the people. Otherwise vice versa.

Concluding:

Everywhere the Party leadership, People's Liberation Guerrilla Army comrades and people warmly arranged Send-off Programs and expressed hearty wishes for good health and long long life to comrade Jan Myrdal and best wishes to comrades Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha and these

comrades have also spoken with great pleasure and expressed gratitude for the cooperation of all comrades to make a success of their mission.