

Dalit-Adivasi Delhi Declaration 2012

A Wake-up Call to the People of India and to the Elected Representatives

WE, 63,000 Dalits and Adivasis, as well as our friends and supporters from all parts of India, have assembled here in the National Dalit-Adivasi Sammelan at Delhi on 23rd November 2012 to tell the entire nation:

OUR STRUGGLE IS THE STRUGGLE OF THE ENTIRE NATION!

- ☞ to preserve and protect, safeguard and promote the democratic values of freedom and equality, social justice and social inclusion;
- ☞ to liberate our Constitution and free the people of our nation from the oppressive forces of caste and patriarchy;
- ☞ to make our Constitutional principles of socialism, secularism, democracy and sovereignty come true on the ground level.

As such, our struggle is in solidarity with the struggles of women and the minorities of our country, who are also fighting for equality and an end to discrimination and social exclusion.

WE have come to Delhi to call upon all the Political Parties, the Central and State Governments, the elected Members of Parliament and State Assemblies to:

- ☞ UPHOLD Art. 17 of the Indian Constitution, through which Untouchability is declared to be abolished!
- ☞ IMPLEMENT Art. 21, which ensures security of life for all, to Dalits and Adivasis!
- ☞ ENFORCE the *Protection of Civil Rights Act*, which ensures protection against caste-based discrimination!
- ☞ ENFORCE Arts. 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee Dalits and Adivasis the right to equality in status, opportunities and access on par with all citizens of India!
- ☞ IMPLEMENT Art. 46, which mandates protection of Dalits and Adivasis from social injustice and all forms of exploitation!
- ☞ PROTECT and SAFEGUARD the rights of our women and children, who are made vulnerable by casteist forces and patriarchal perpetrators of violence!

We want Indian society as a whole to probe its moral conscience and ask itself whether it is honest to its own ideals; whether it wants India to move forward on the road of progress as per the

Constitutional directives, or walk the path of backwardness as per the archaic laws of the caste system.

WE therefore call on the Nation today to:

- ☞ STOP UNTOUCHABILITY AND DISCRIMINATION ANY TIME AND ANY PLACE!
- ☞ END ATROCITIES!!
- ☞ ANNIHILATE CASTE AND PATRIARCHY!!

WE have gathered here in particular to make a demand on our Central Government and our Parliament to ACKNOWLEDGE the poor implementation of the SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and to AMEND this Act urgently in order to make it comprehensive and stronger for effective implementation.

Continuing to be inspired by Dr B.R. Ambedkar's directive to EDUCATE, ORGANIZE AND AGITATE.....

Informing the entire nation that we will not stop our struggle to liberate our nation and the application of our Constitution from the oppressive caste and patriarchal forces.....

Affirming our right to dignity, equality and freedom.....

We unanimously adopt this ***DALIT-ADIVASI DELHI DECLARATION as a WAKE-UP CALL TO THE PEOPLE OF INDIA AND TO THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES.***

Bonded Together and Struggling Collectively

1. We, Dalits and Adivasis, have travelled to Delhi from near and far. We may differ in regions and languages, creeds and cultures, ideologies and political affiliations. Despite all such multiplicity and diversity, what has bonded us together, presently and all along in history, is:

- ☞ *how we built our nation,*
- ☞ *for what we have struggled in our nation,*
- ☞ *what we went through in our struggles,* and
- ☞ *what we now demand from our nation.*

How did we build our nation?

2. We, Dalits and Adivasis, have provided the moral foundation, the ideology and the leadership on which the Indian nation is constructed, before and after Independence. We contributed to the development and growth of our nation. We owned and protected the forests,

nurtured and safeguarded the natural resources, thus preserving eco-diversity and maintaining eco-balance. We - women, men and children - together tilled the land to feed the people of the entire country; we laid the roadways and railways with our manual labour, and built the seaports and airports for commerce and commuters; with our hands we laid the foundation for the cities and metros to make them mega and modern.

For what have we struggled in our nation?

3. However, as the true leaders of this nation, whenever we asserted our equal rights to food, water, shelter and land, demanded access to panchayat governance, laid claim to our rights to education and reservation, protested against physical and sexual assault unleashed against our women and girls, fought against caste and ethnicity-based discrimination in health, housing and employment, clamoured for reservation in the private sector, affirmed our right to free speech, equal wages, mobility from place to place what we really struggled for was:

- to uphold the rights and entitlements of Dalits and Adivasis, as promised by the Constitution;
- to claim our right to full-fledged citizenship, no less equal to others in our country.

What did we go through in our struggles?

4. In the process of our struggles our rights were denied, our demands were refused, we were tortured, our labourers were killed or forced to do manual scavenging, our women were raped, trafficked and made *devadasis*, our children were made bonded labourers, our youth were mutilated, our lands were appropriated, our hard-earned properties were burnt down, our communities were ostracized. Moreover, we were killed and our properties destroyed because we changed religion. The nation's history is witness to a series of atrocities committed against our two most patriotic communities - the Dalits and Adivasis. To cite only a few here:

- ☞ the Kilavenmani massacre of 42 Dalits in Tamil Nadu (1968)
- ☞ the gruesome killing of Dalit Kotesu at Kanchikacherla, Andhra Pradesh (1969)
- ☞ the killings of 10 Adivasis by police over a land dispute at Indravalli, Andhra Pradesh (1978)
- ☞ the massacres of Dalits at Belchi, Bihar (1979)
- ☞ the massacre at Kafalta in Uttar Pradesh after a Dalit bridegroom rode on a horse (1980)
- ☞ the killing of Bacchdas in Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh (1982)
- ☞ the killing in police firing of 15 Adivasis at Banjhi in Bihar (1985)
- ☞ the mass murder of Dalits in Kumher village in Rajasthan (1992)
- ☞ the assault and rape of 18 Adivasi women and looting and destruction of property by forest officials in Vaacchathi village in Tamil Nadu (1992)
- ☞ the burning to death of 8 Dalits in Kamballapalli in Karnataka (2000)
- ☞ the forcing of five chained Dalit bonded labourers to work in a stone quarry in Hangarahalli village in Karnataka (2000)
- ☞ the police attack and killing of scores of Adivasis in Muthanga range in Kerala (2003)

- ☞ the vicious attack on a Dalit man from Jhabbar in Punjab, leading to his two arms and leg having to be amputated (2006)
- ☞ the brutal murder of 4 Dalits in Khairlanji, Maharashtra (2006)
- ☞ the 93 Dalit and Adivasi Christians killed, property destroyed and 56,000 people displaced from 415 villages due to communal carnage in Kandhamal in Orissa (2008)
- ☞ the gang rape and killing of an Adivasi woman by Tripura State Rifles personnel at Shikaribari village in Tripura (2011)
- ☞ the murder of 5 Dalits and injury of 20 others at Lakshimpeta, Andhra Pradesh (2012)
- ☞ the series of brutal gang rapes of Dalit girls and women in Haryana between September and November 2012
- ☞ the police firing on Dalits at Than town in Gujarat (2012)
- ☞ the planned looting and burning of 405 houses in Natham, Anna Nagar and Kodampatti villages in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu (2012).

Hope dawns at last!

5. Under continued pressure from Dalit and Adivasi MPs, political leaders and the community, the magnitude and gravity of caste and ethnicity-based discrimination and atrocities was finally recognized by the Indian Parliament, which rose to the occasion in 1989 by promulgating the significant legislation known as the *SCs/STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act*.

6. This legislation has been a powerful tool for us to use and assert our rights to dignity, equality, life and security in all matters related to our social status and livelihood concerns. In a special way, it has been a valuable tool for our Dalit and Adivasi women to assert their dignity as women, and to safeguard their bodily integrity and security in the face of the many physical assaults and multiple forms of sexual exploitation and atrocities unleashed on them.

But it's a short-lived Hope!

7. However, the implementation of this law has been impeded by the social prejudices of political leaders and government servants, including the police. The nexus between them and the criminals based on caste and ethnic considerations has made it easy for the latter to escape the arm of the law. The outcome has been high acquittals and low conviction rates under the PoA Act, resulting in gross impunity.

8. It is not surprising, therefore, that atrocities are still rampant in the country. From *only* the official registered data, we know that every 4 minutes a crime is committed against SCs and STs; every day 27 atrocities are committed against them (3 rapes, 11 assaults, 13 murders); every week 5 of their houses or possessions are burnt and 6 persons are kidnapped or abducted. In the last 15 years, approximately 1.5 crores of Dalits and Adivasis have suffered atrocities. We are also aware

that such forms of atrocities like bonded labour, child labour, manual scavenging, witchcraft and *devadasi* practices are still prevalent in the country.

MPs and MLAs, hear our collective voice!

9. We have come to Delhi today in large numbers because we are very much disturbed and depressed by this inhuman and callous situation. We have journeyed here today to let Parliament know our pain and anguish, anger and protest, and hear our cry for justice. We want the Central and State Governments, the Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies, and every wing of the State and Central government administration to listen to our cry for justice.

10. Sixty-three years have passed since the Constitution was promulgated. Twenty-three years have gone by since the PoA Act was passed. We have waited too long! But we have come to Delhi today - yet again with hope. And again we do not want our hope to become empty, our future to become bleak - for us now, for our children tomorrow and their children the day after.

What we now demand from our nation

11. Our one and only aim in coming here to Delhi is to place before the nation as a whole, and in particular the Parliament and the Central Government, the State Legislative Assemblies and the State Governments, the following specific demands:

To our Elected Representatives

- ☞ Amend the PoA Act & its Rules urgently and make it a more comprehensive and powerful deterrent law against any form of atrocity against SCs and STs!
- ☞ Implement the Act & the Rules strictly, punish the guilty swiftly as per the law, and secure full justice, adequate compensation and comprehensive rehabilitation for the victims of atrocities!
- ☞ Take speedy and effective steps to annihilate caste in all its forms and expressions!
- ☞ We call upon all the MPs and MLAs and their Political Parties to fulfil faithfully and totally their Constitutional obligation to safeguard and protect the right to life and security of Dalits and Adivasis as full-fledged citizens of this country!

To our Nation

- ☞ We want all civil society organizations and institutions to fulfil their duty to safeguard and promote the right to life and security of Dalits and Adivasis, and to perform their democratic role of bringing the state organs and actors to account in this regard!
- ☞ We want the national and regional media agencies not only to report incidents of atrocities, but also to engage the public in debates on the larger issues of caste confederations, caste

communal clashes, caste movements and caste vote bases as serious threats to national integration, and to initiate a discourse on the annihilation of caste altogether!

- ☞ We want cultural, educational and religious institutions to confront ideologies that perpetuate Untouchability in particular, and the caste system in general, and to engage the public in activities that will root out caste-based mind-sets and values.

And finally, we state in a clear and forthright manner that Parliament and State Legislatures are OUR forums. Therefore, we call upon all Dalits, Adivasis and others in this country to name, shame and defeat any candidates with casteist, communalist and sexist track records across all parties, to deny them entry into these portals of people's power. We want our concerns and our demands to be given priority in the debates and deliberations in these forums.

'My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is the battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of human personality.'

- Dr B.R. Ambedkar