

## Back from the Killing Fields

*[An All India Independent Fact Finding Team comprising Medha Patkar, D Thankappan, Dr. B D Sharma, Tridib Ghosh, G N Saibaba, Arun Khote, Rakesh Rafiq, Ram Dhiraj, Shriman and Mehr Engineer visited the affected villages of Nandigram immediately after the ghastly massacre on March 14, 2007. We publish below some excerpts from the preliminary report circulated by the team.]*

The team visited various villages in the Nandigram area and PG hospital, Kolkata, Nandigram and Tamluk (district) hospitals. The team also met the District Magistrate and Collector of East Midnapur and talked to various political and people's organizations. The team conducted elaborate interviews with the villagers in the affected area and also talked to the victims and their relatives.

Some of the members of the team investigated into the January incidence in Nandigram and so the team was aware of a number of issues involved in the present situation.

When the team visited the various hamlets of Gokulnagar including Adhikaripara; Sonachura, Bhangabera; Maheshpur and Hazarakanta, a number of facts relating to the incident emerged :

1. The people, majority of them women, informed the team members of the incidence that occurred in Gokulnagar and Sonachura with total unanimity. They said that they were receiving threats of attacks from the CPI(M) leaders and cadres since days. The attack was supposed to be immediately after the school exams but it was postponed.
2. Also, it was said that Secretary, Home Affairs, Mr. P. R. Roy had categorically stated publicly that the Government would forcibly enter and establish the rule of law in Nandigram. A similar statement came from IG, Law and Order. The likelihood of state repression was therefore known to the people all over the state of West Bengal at least 2 days before the incident. There were some protests in Nandigram.
3. The police entered from Khejuri and Tekhali, the known bases of CPI(M) into the villages Sona-chura and Gokulnagar respectively. The police entered the area from 3 entry points which are Garchakraberia, Bhangabera and 7 Jalpai. In both the places the people were conducting Puja or reading Quran at the time when the police entered the villages. They were worshipping Maha-prabhu Gourangadev. Apparently they were protesting the announced entry of the police but also peacefully involved in religious activities believing that they will be protected by God. At both the places the women and children were in the forefront. They expressed that they put women and children in front expecting that police would not attack them. The nature of protest shows clearly that it was peaceful and there was no possibility of any untoward incident happening. There was no need for police firing on the people who have gathered in these 2 places.
4. The women waved their hands and shouted that they should not be attacked upon and also appealed to the police that they were only conducting Puja and Police should not interfere or enter the villages.

5. Without giving any time to the people the police started firing the tear gas shells and rubber bullets. As per the report of the people the entire area was covered with smoke. Within 10 minutes, even before the people could realize what was happening, the police started firing bullets mostly above the waistline. The women were specially targeted including those who were trying to flee away. At both the places there was stampede and chaos. At Bhangabera, the police chased the villagers firing from the back upto 2 kilometers into Sonachura village.
6. Apart from the initial firing and killing of the people the police continued firing in the villages for the next 24 hours by cordoning off the villages to prevent entry of outsiders including the place. There was large scale looting, burning of the village house and property and raping as reported by the local people. The police and cadres entered various houses, mercilessly beat and dragged people out and raped and molested the women inside.
7. According to local reports the state Government and Midnapore police administration were well prepared for the attack on the villagers which is corroborated by the people's narration. For example the Midnapore police administration requested for 40,000 rounds of ammunition and 40 ambulances from the state administration a few days before the incident. This clearly shows that the whole attack on the villagers was well planned one whereas the people were totally unprepared for this brutality.
8. According to the oral narrations of the villagers, the police resorted to firing while the CPI(M) cadres were directing them closely. The CPI(M) "activists" mostly, mobilized from outside these villages were in khaki uniform but wearing chappals. The women in Adhikaripara in Gokulnagar clearly told that the uniforms didn't fit them mostly and they wore Red tags in their wrists. The villagers referred to these khaki clad non-police personnel as cadre Vahini or *Harmad Vahini*. The people in the villages namely Sonachura, Tekhali Bazaar, Gokulanagar Panchayet reported that the 'Harmad Vahini' entered their villages in hundreds from the Khejuri side. They fired indiscriminately from local made and imported weapons and the hospital authorities confirmed injury marks of bullets other than those used by the police have been found on the victims.
9. The people of Sonachura village reported that about 35 children who were studying in a Rama-krishna Saral Kindergarten Vidyalaya are still missing. Their whereabouts are not known. There are cases of missing children from other villages too. The parents naturally are very worried and apprehend that they were killed and their bodies have been abducted. The villagers reported that these 'Harmad Vahini' not only killed but also abducted the dead bodies in a routine manner. The school uniforms of 2 children were found in the bushes nearby. Incident of the children being killed and torn apart by pulling aside their 2 legs were also reported.
10. The villagers of Sonachura repeated time and again with anguish that many dead bodies of the people killed in the firing were buried by the police with the help of CPI(M) cadres in the trenches dug by the villagers earlier to restrict entry of police into the villages. If this report is to be believed, the authorities should immediately arrange for digging of the filled in trenches to verify this claim. The villagers also reported that some dead bodies were carried away in a truck.

11. The other very brutal aspect is while the villagers were trying to nurse the wounded, they were severely beaten by the police and also ambulances were prevented in rescue operation.
12. The still continuing presence of police in the area is a matter of great concern to the villagers because the police is providing protection and support to the CPI(M) goons. The current situation is also preventing the children to go to schools and the women from going to the market. All the schools in that area are closed as of now. The police continue to invade the village houses from time to time.
13. In Sonachura, it was during the presence of the team that the information of 3 persons being kidnapped reached the villagers and the youths from the families of the victims became furious screaming and abusing police. They were pacified by the other villagers and team members.
14. The women of Gokulnagar reported that the police were trying to make vulgar gestures on March 16th when the women had to run away to save themselves from any untoward incidence.
15. Women, raped and molested, were interviewed in the hospitals who have faced physical injury and mental shock but with no lady doctor or counselors to take care of. The investigation to establish rape is also not completed.
16. A number of wounded persons, children to the aged and a large number are still lying in the villages unable to reach the hospitals and are being threatened by the CPI(M) attacks from the adjacent areas.
17. The people expressed their helplessness not being able to file FIRs, many being illiterate and outside supporters have not yet been able to reach them, especially due to CPI(M) protests and blockades.
18. Hundreds of families especially labourers, said they were without any income over days while others complained of not being permitted to visit Tekhali Market by party goons. Many families could not cook and eat 2 meals over last 2 days, while they could not have peaceful sleep over weeks.
19. The people invariably, especially the women screaming in pain and anguish were emphatic in their expression and demand that Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as CM and Home Minister should be held responsible and guilty and should be punished for cold-blooded murder of women and children. They even demanded that capital punishment be given to the guilty when a poor person like Dhananjay faced the same for a rape and murder.
20. With many families having faced death and devastations and all the communities in the area shattered, the people are still unanimous with their resolve that they will not allow their land and resources to be taken over.

*[P.S. Meanwhile, some progressive doctors visited the affected villages in Nandigram on March 18, 2007 only to discover to their utter horror that the situation was more grave than what they anticipated—800 missings, countless raped, above 100 children butchered, dead bodies truck-loaded and dumped into sea as per local eye witness accounts.] ❄❄❄*

