

A BRIEF REPORT ON NANDIGRAM

On 25th March, several of us made a trip to Nandigram, partly to distribute aid, partly to find out the situation. Three of us subsequently went to the SSKM Hospital and met some of the victims who were being treated. This brief report/deposition is based on our observations and documentation at Nandigram and Kolkata.

The following were the persons interviewed, on 25th March 2007, with such identification as we could obtain.

1. Buddhadev Mondal -- independent social activist, Nandigram town.
2. Ashish Mondal -- Bhumi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee, Mahespur.
3. Samad -- Jamait-ulema i Hind and Convenor, BUPC, Etimkhana, Nandigram.
4. Kamallata -- Kalicharanpur. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
5. Anuradha Mondal -- Southkhali Char. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
6. Nur Jahan Bibi -- Garchakraberia. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
7. Mehrunnisa -- No. 7 Jalpai. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
8. Sheikh Sultan -- Nandigram. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
9. Manasi -- Sarberia. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
10. Bhagirath Patra -- Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara. Interviewed at Nandigram Hospital.
11. Amina Bibi, Garchakraberia.
12. Goley Ara Bibi, Garchakraberia.
13. Khokon Adhikary, Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara.
14. Pusparani Mondal -- Gokulnagar Dakshin Pally, Adhikaripara.
15. Chhabirani Mondal -- Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara.
16. Babita Das -- Kalicharanpur.
17. Nilima Das -- Gokulnagar Dakshin Pally, Adhikaripara.
18. Bakulrani Mondal -- Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara.
19. Jahnavirani Mondal -- Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara.
20. Namita Dasadhikary -- Adhikaripara.

In addition, we interviewed large groups of people. Particularly those at Sonachura were clear that we should not disclose their identity or photos, so they have been consistently mentioned as “women at Sonachura” and “group at Sonachura”.

At SSKM we talked with Bhabani Giri of Kalicharanpur and Tapasi Das of Adhikaripara, on 28th March 2007.

Before the 14th of March:

On the night of 6-7 January 2007, armed party cadres of the CPI(M) had launched an attack. Despite the fact that the Bhumi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee[BUPC] had made appeals, and according to locals, the obvious evidence of arms collection by thugs, the police made no efforts to prevent the attack. Subsequently, not only were there regular raids from the Khejuri side, but also an economic blockade organised by the Haldia Development Authority, headed by CPI(M) MP Lakshman Seth, by stopping the ferry,

which is so important for the people. For two and a half months, the police remained mute spectators, instead of intervening to halt these multi-pronged attacks on the people of Nandigram. Women at Sonachura said that there had been hit and run attacks ever since the 7th of January. Amina Bibi has her own land, and has family members in the administration. She is active in the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee from Garhchakraberia. She also reported that violence had been going on ever since January. When they asked the Panchayat Pradhan for details about the land acquisition circular from Haldia, he refused to pay heed to them.



Amina Bibi

When they took out a procession on 3rd January, they were attacked at Bhutar More, where women and children were beaten up without provocation. This led to an attack on a police car which was burnt. However, on that day nobody died. But on the 6th, when they took out a procession to Block 10 (Sonachura), three men died. She reported cases of attacks and planned firing from Garupara, Adhikaripara, etc. Series of attacks were also planned at Sonachura, Bhangabera, Tulaghata, Chandar Pool and Tekhali Bazaar. She affirmed that their agitation was essentially peaceful, and they did not possess firearms, but they were determined not to give up their land. And so, according to her, the violence of 14th March was the culmination of these sporadic but planned attacks.

How About the Several Thousand Ousted from Nandigram:

The figure was contested by everyone we talked with. However, there was an acknowledgement that some people had left the area. Women at Sonachura remarked that the CPI(M) leader Joydev Paik, who was once trusted by them, had assured them even on the evening of 6th January that there would be no violence, but had left the area. Such CPI(M) leaders were the ones who left. According to them only five families of their locality had left. It was a general sentiment that because the CPI(M) lacked local support that they had to call in outsiders as well as the police, even after leaving Nandigram. Samad of Jamait Ulema-i-Hind (also Convenor of the BUPC) asserted that the total number of people who had left would be around 200-250. He challenged the CPI(M) to produce a list of names, and said that they would guarantee that if indeed innocent villagers had left in fear, they could return. Khokon Adhikary claimed that the people who had left were people who had joined the goonda forces and were carrying out attacks on the people of Nandigram. Both Samad and Adhikary ridiculed the march of people from camps in Khejuri to Kolkata, saying that it was easy to produce people who lived in blocks outside Nandigram and pass them off as Nandigram residents. Samad asserted that even in Nandigram, women had been brought in and attempt had been made to pass them off as women from Sonachura. But when they were asked details about their identity, they could not but be exposed. People who dared to do this in Nandigram, he said, could go to any length in Kolkata.

Occasionally, a different voice emerged. Some of us visited the house of a CPI(M) sympathiser in Adhikari Para who had fled. The house was identified by the villagers

themselves. When asked, his wife reported that her husband had been staying in the Tekhali bazaar ever since “terror had been unleashed from both sides”. He had a shop in the market and had left after the first procession of the “Banchao Committee” had come out due to “fear”. Though initially she said that she was not under any pressure from the opposition party as she stayed with her in-laws, she later deposed that she did not leave the house fearing that it might be damaged in her absence. She had sent her daughter to her natal home for safety. In another case, Rekha Das, former member of the Adhikaripara Panchayat, and wife of a CPI(M) man who had fled, was urged by Khokon Adhikary to leave the village since her husband was not coming back. This was evidently a form of pressure on pro-CPI(M) people to leave Nandigram.

The Nature of the Land and livelihood:

One of the arguments we had read about in the media, was that much of the land proposed for take over was poor quality land, and many people were willing to give up their land. We had questions to ask about this. Our own impression, based on what we saw, was that the land under discussion was good quality land. According to villagers and Nandigram town residents, including Buddhadev Mondal (independent social activist), Ashish Mondal of the Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee, Samad, former CPI(M) supporters (women) of Sonachura who did not wish to disclose their names, another mixed crowd at Sonachura, Khokon Adhikary, the propaganda is fabricated. One group at Sonachura said that in their area, lack of irrigation made some land single cropping. But even that soil provided them with enough paddy to eat and have a marketable surplus. Elsewhere, they said, irrigation had created multi-crop land. So the development needed was irrigation. Khokon Adhikary said land in Adhikaripara permitted two rice crops, khesari(a variety of pulse), as well as cash crops like sunflower and rajanigandha. At Garchakraberia, much khesari dal is grown. Women at Sonachura said they produced a variety of vegetables as well as a rabi and a kharif rice. It was also pointed out that the salty land was mostly close to the river, and had been acquired at the time of the Jellingham Project, several years back. Potato was another major crop, and so was the betel (paan) leaf. Some amount of pisciculture was also reported. People were mainly dependent on agriculture, and wanted development to mean improvement of agriculture. According to Samad, much of the targeted land had originally been khas (vested) land. Though people had been settled there, he suspected that they often did not have proper documentation(pattas), and they could be ousted without due compensation, and this, rather than the supposed low quality of soil, was the reason why this particular area was targeted.



Sunflower field – not poor soil

We did not find a single person coming forward and saying s/he wanted to give up the land and move out. Anuradha Mondal, an injured woman, works in other peoples’ homes. Even she asserted, that here she at least has her home plot at South Khali and has the option of working at the homes of better of people. If they were all evicted, she did not

know how she would survive. Kamallata Das, who had received bullet injuries, asserted that they would not yield their land under any circumstance. Women at Sonachura said that they used to be CPI(M) cadres. Their families had small plots of land. They had never heard, at any panchayat meeting, women's meeting, etc, that land would be taken for industry. Suddenly this was sprung upon them. They said, "Where would we live if our homestead is taken away. It was then that we decided to stay with the movement." Since then they have been associated with the BUPC. They insisted that there had been no proper discussion, and that for them development did not mean superimposing the facilities that Kolkata has, in an area where majority of the people depend on agriculture. One woman said, when she had married, to come to her husband's place from her natal home, one had to walk through knee-deep mud. This was a tangible development, that now they had good roads. But if the cost of development was that she would be thrown out of the area, what use was development to her? Khokon argued that the industrialization they wanted was to reopen closed industries. Land should be acquired for industry only where it was not suitable for agriculture. His was deadly against giving any land to Beni Santos, a group that was identified as mass murderers. There was 60,000 bigha of land in the area, and they would not surrender their land even for crores of rupees. Another group of people at Sonachura remarked that people of 37 moujas had refused to give up land, and so the local CPI(M) leaders had tried the tactics of bringing people from Blocks 2 and 3, outside Nandigram, to create an artificial majority.

What was the social composition of the movement?:

According to Samad, agitators comprised 60% Muslims and the other 40% mostly lower caste Hindus. Mobilisation techniques included, especially on 14th March itself, religious instruments, such as organizing a Gourango Puja and a Koran reading ceremony. The use of religious symbols did not imply a communalization of the movement that could be perceived, contrary to claims made by the Chief Minister. However, a degree of social conservatism and unstated patriarchy seemed to be present. There was also a strong degree of community solidarity. Our questions brought forth the answer that women and children had been put up front because it was assumed that the police would not fire in such a case. Women, who asserted that they had themselves gone ahead, said that the reason was, if the men-folk died, the entire family would starve, while if the women died, the men could re-marry. If indeed there had been ongoing violence since January, this strategy indicates that the idea that there would be no violence if women were placed before the men was hardly based on a serious consideration of the situation.

Was 14th March A Locally Conceived Plan?:

There has been a sustained drive to prove that the attack on 14th March was not centrally planned. At least two things give a lie to this. On the 12th, an all party meeting was called, which was boycotted by the forces in BUPC. This meeting gave the go ahead for the attack. Secondly, police units from far flung parts of West Bengal were called in, certainly not an action taken by some mere local officials, low level police officers, or local CPI(M) leaders.

The violence of 14th March:

Role of State:

From our interviews, it appeared that though men had been placed at the back, most firing had targeted men, and further, that people had died due to direct hits, in upper parts of the body. Moreover, Khokon Adhikary claimed that bullets of certain calibres, not standard issue for the police, had been used. Concerning the firing itself, interviews revealed that nobody had heard of any prior warning. There had been tear gas shell firing, lathi charge, and then the blow of a whistle, and an immediate recourse to firing bullets. This had been done despite the presence of an officer of IG rank (this we learnt from newspapers) at Bhangabera, and an Executive Magistrate at Adhikaripara. Our own pictures show that the distance between the police and the place where the Gourango Puja was being organized was so far that bricks hurled could not reach the police. So there is no truth in the speculation that the police were compelled to shoot on being attacked with bricks. Rather, we were repeatedly told that the leaders of the movement had warned against any violence, and had talked of peaceful demonstrations. The women had fallen on their knees and had begged the police to go back. Interestingly, the police had claimed that they were coming to repair the roads. In that case, it is inexplicable why such a massive police force was present, rather than a smaller force accompanying repairmen. What the foregoing suggested was that

a) The state machinery had been sent with some kind of instruction to use excessive force.

b) The state machinery had also been asked to connive at the role of non-state actors. This was clearly borne out by the testimony of injured people, such as Nur Jehan Bibi, who said that apart from police, people in black dress were shooting. Samad likewise affirmed the presence of party-men under police protection. Sheikh Sultan described these people as “policemen wearing sandals”, i.e., people who had been given uniforms but not regulation boots. Same comments were made by Amina Bibi as well as a group of women at Sonachura.

Role of the CPI(M)

Everyone was agreed that the CPI(M) goons (*harmad bahini*) had been present in large numbers. Large scale use of party cadres taking shelter behind the police indicates a previously worked out plan between party and administration. This has longer run implications, suggesting as it does that in West Bengal, there is little administrative autonomy, with the party’s will being imposed on officials as high up as an IG of Police. While the police had been brutal enough, CPI(M) cadres played a particularly violent role, on and after the 14th. Women at Sonachura testified that party members had not only come on the 14th but subsequently. They said that on the 15th, there was a pressure from the CPI(M) cadres that there must be a rally to show that “peace” had been restored in Nandigram, and that those who had been in the forefront of resistance must join in this demonstration. One of them was told by them, “In the past you had blown on conch shells to mobilize women. Why are you not coming out now?” Pusparani Mondal said that on the 15th, Badal Garu, Kaya Garu and Haripada Patra of Garupara had shoved and pushed at her and forced her to go to their party office. There, she was told in a very abusive manner, “So you have become a Matangini?” They threatened that her husband’s head would be chopped off, and told that in atonement for her past role, she must mobilize the women of the locality, join the CPI(M) “peace rally” on 15th afternoon, be at the forefront and carry a red flag. With great arrogance, she was warned off for daring to protest against the state, which was like a mighty tidal wave, while all their forces

amounted to water in a small pitcher. Pusparani broke into tears while narrating how men of her father's age could use such an abusive language. While women were the general targets activists were specific targets.

Namita Dasadhikary of Gokulnagar, said that police and party cadres jointly battered down their door and looted the house, as well as their jewelry shop at Tekhali Bazaar. They have no land, and the shop was their sole means of livelihood.

Bhagirath Patra, who has business at Haldia, was returning on the 18th. A group of people with their faces covered with black cloth caught hold of him, put a revolver against his temple, throttled him with a leather belt, beat him up with sticks and a revolver butt, snatched his money, and left him unconscious in a field. We met him at the Nandigram hospital.

A man who did not wish to be identified by name, a part of the mixed crowd at Sonachura, said that he works outside Nandigram, and on the 15th, without knowing that roads were closed, was trying to come back to Nandigram. He boarded a bus, which was halted at Chandipur, where CPI(M) cadres were taking down names, place of residence, name of the Anchal Pradhan, etc. A man who gave a wrong identification was beaten up, so this man decided to be truthful. But when he identified himself as coming from Sonachura, he was abused in a vulgar language, beaten up, and his money and wrist-watch snatched away.

The Pattern of Attack on the 14th:

Every narrative drove home the fact that the violence on the 14th was totally unexpected, not just to the rank and file, but even to the leadership. This was shown in the baffled comment by Samad, who said that they had had a prior discussion with the Superintendent of Police, who had, according to Samad's version, told them that the police would come, but would retreat if provided with resistance. The plan of resistance was completely non-violent. As Kamallata and Ashish Mondal both affirmed, the leadership had given clear instructions that there was to be no violent confrontation with the police. Kamallata said that the leadership announced, using the microphone which was relaying the kirtan of the Gourango Puja, that police would come, but the police were friends of everyone, so no violence was to be shown. They were coming for peace, and when the people told them they would not give up their land, the police would retreat. Under no circumstances were the assembled people to confront the police. Instead, a non-violent strategy was planned, of organizing Gourango Puja and Koran reading. Samad showed considerable resentment when he stated that the SP and the IG had not kept their words, and had not followed the government rules regarding making an announcement (to disperse) before opening fire. As he also put it, while they came ostensibly to repair the road, in fact they brought the CPI(M) cadres. That they were cadres, not the police, was proved by the fact that as far as they went, the red flag was put up.

That no violence had been planned is evident from the fact that children had been placed in front, followed by teenagers, then older women, and the men behind them all. But the police came up, and immediately started lobbing tear gas shells. As the women were trying to put wet towels to their faces and telling the police that there was no lack of peace in Nandigram so they should go back, the police began firing bullets. However, according to Amina, the women seem not to have been the principal targets of the bullets. And that alone indicates planned firing. To shoot at men, and to hit them on the upper

parts of their bodies, meant taking deliberate aim and firing at people who were standing behind the women and children.

Both Nur Jahan and Anuradha Mondal related that streams of police cars were coming. Within fifteen minutes of the cars coming up around 10 AM, the sequence of firing had begun. In other words, there had been no attempt whatsoever at parleying. Goley Ara Bibi related, “We had thought, we would have our say, the administration would have its say, then there would be a peaceful resolution. But for that, would we have taken along so many children?” She also stressed that they had no weapons. Unable to resist, many of them were beaten up, while many others became unwell due to the effects of the tear gas, as in the case of Amina Bibi. She was taken to the courtyard of a house near-by. Cadres threw stones and bricks at women, forcing them to dive into ponds. Amina Bibi also said that men received bullet injuries in greater number, while women were subjected to sexual assault.

Sheikh Sultan had gone to Bhutar More, Garchakraberia, where his elder sister lived. His brother in law told him to join the “peace procession” at Bhangabera. According to his estimate there were 1500 children, about 5000 women and 10 to 15 thousand men. He was shot at his right foot in such a way that the bone was exposed. He was still in trauma when we talked with him. He not only remembered his own injury, but the large scale violence on women and children, which was keeping him awake at nights.



Sheikh Sultan's bullet injury

The women at Sonachura narrated other cases of violence. One woman talked of a man whose throat was bleeding (it is unclear whether this too was a bullet wound or a knife injury), while one woman had a gun shot wound in her stomach.

Challenging the claim that shots had been fired at the police, Samad asked whether a single policeman with gun shot injuries could be produced.



The distance: How could People hit the police with stones?

At Adhikaripara, as at Bhangabera, Gourango Puja had been organised by Hindus. Women had been placed in front. As at Bhangabera, Muslims were organizing Koran reading. When the police came in, women requested them to go back. But the police attacked them instead, and threw down the image of the god. Both Khokon Adhikary and Pusparani Mondal corroborated this. Pusparani had told the police that they would themselves repair the roads, provide the police gave a written undertaking not to seize their land. In response the police started firing teargas shells in such large numbers that they could see nothing. This was followed by blank shots, and then live bullets.



Pusparani Mondal

Violence and Sexual Assault on Women:

All the narratives indicate a high degree of violence against unarmed and peaceful women, including verbal sexual violence as well as sexual assault and rape. According to Anuradha Mondal, they had seen no police women. The entire attacking force consisted of men. While fewer women seem to have been deliberately shot, there were all kinds of violence perpetrated. Without distinguishing between police and party cadre, but with a clear indication that party cadres were involved, it was narrated repeatedly that stones and bricks were hurled at the women while their visibility was affected due to intensive teargas shelling. At Bhangabera, west of the bridge over which the police came, there was a big pond. Hurling bricks at the women, the attackers forced the women towards it. Many were compelled to jump into it. Yelling sexually offensive abuses, the attackers forced them into the pond, where stones continued to be thrown at them. Anuradha Mondal recalled being told, “So you came to save your land? Now we will drown you.” According to Mondal, among the women there were some who could not swim, and some may have been drowned. The thugs started stripping off women. Anuradha Mondal’s sari was snatched away, and she had to run to a house to borrow a sari in order to return home. Kamallata related that she and four others were running away. They were beaten up with rods. Her left arm was also injured by a gun shot. She managed to hide in a cremation ground. She saw the four others who had been with her being caught and completely stripped till not a thread remained on their bodies. Nur Jahan was beaten on her legs and neck with the butt of a rifle. In fright, she went and hid in a jungle for three days, before an old woman grazing her goats saw her and she was ultimately rescued. Nur Jahan and Sheikh Sultan both related that they had seen women’s breasts being cut off. Ashish Mondal, who had also been present at Bhangabera, confirmed this. Mehrunnisa and another woman fell into a pond, due to poor visibility. She said that four men had beaten up the two of them. Of all the injured we saw, Mehrunnisa was in the most severe pain, with her left side, lower back and neck almost immobile. She had saved herself by locking herself for the whole day in the toilet of someone’s house.



Kamallata Das



Bullet Injury – Kamallata’s arm

At Adhikaripara, we heard more sustained reports of sexual and other violence on women. Both Khokon Adhikary and many of the women themselves corroborated this. The first person to be beaten up was identified as Ajay Dasadhikary’s wife. Women were raped, batons were pushed into their vaginas, they were stripped and raped, not only at

the site of attack, but even when they ran away, by following them to their homes. Khokon mentioned specifically the wife of Satyendralal Adhikary, and Prabhat Adhikary's daughter. Pusparani Mondal and another woman of the same area talked about the insertion of rods in women's vagina in public, in front of other people. This was often done while the women were dazed due to tear gas. Many women showed us various parts of their bodies where they had been injured. They included Jahnvirani Mondal, Nilima Das, Babita Das, Namita Dasadhikary, Bakulrani Mondal, Chhabirani Mondal. Chhabirani Mondal was hit by something, either a rubber bullet or a splinter, on the left eye which was already suffering from cataract, and since then she has lost her vision in that eye. Jahnvirani Mondal mentioned the use of crude and offensive language.



Chhabirani Mondal



Anuradha Mondal



Injury on Anuradha's leg

A case mentioned by several people was the rape of many [the number varied from narrator to narrator, ranging from 30-40 to over 100] young girls and women after dragging them to the abandoned house of Shankar Samanta. Women at Sonachura, as well as Samad, Ashish Mondal and Buddhadev Mondal mentioned this case. They alleged that CPI(M) cadres had kept guard outside the house, allowing none to go in, while these deeds were being perpetrated. Women's clothing, especially underclothing, was found in huge numbers, as were bloodstains marked by the CBI team. Because the people were at that point more concerned with trying to recover dead bodies that had floated up in the pond, nobody knew what happened to those young women. We tried to ascertain whether the list of missing included such a large number of young women, but got no clear response. Nor could we understand what the CBI had done, apart from marking the bloodstains.



Women's clothing at Shankar Samanta's house



Bloodstain marked by CBI

Assault on children

Since the greatest number of children seems to have come from Garchakraberia, the people of Garchakraberia were most vocal in talking about the murder of children. An extremely brutal incident was repeated by a number of people. This was a case of a young child being torn from limb to limb. Nur Jahan claimed she had seen the incident herself, with two policemen killing the child and throwing the body into a water body.

Mehrunnisa also claimed to have seen the incident, as did Sheikh Sultan. Asked questions about the identity of the victims, the respondents replied that they were trying to save their own lives and were in no position to make inquiries. People interviewed at Sonachura remarked that many people had taken along very small children and infants, and had to drop such children when running in fright. Some women were also reported to have died along with their children. A truckload of earth was dumped on the portion of the road that had been cut, and this was done so suddenly that many of the children who had fallen in due to the tear gas and shooting were to remain underneath that huge load of soil. Samad mentioned the testimony of a woman we could not meet, according to whom, at Adhikaripara a young boy of about 7-8 years had run to her for safety, but the thugs took him away and slit open his throat with a big knife. Kamallata and her husband rescued their two children from the mud deposited on the bank of the canal, where they hid for 4 days.

Where are the bodies?

The narratives we heard, from Samad, from Ashish Mondal, as well as from the people who had been injured, suggested a much higher death toll than the officially admitted 14. We were however unable to understand how so many bodies could be made to vanish, and asked the question to a number of our respondents. We were given different possible solutions. In the first place, it was remarked that a large number of cars had come, including unnumbered ambulances, trucks and vans, trekkers, and many of the bodies had been spirited away in these cars. A second possibility was that many of the bodies had had their stomachs slit open and then dumped into the canal, which would take the body to the sea. A third possibility was that some of the bodies were cremated. Finally, it was suggested that some bodies had been buried locally. We wondered why the CBI had not dug up any of the sites where locals claimed bodies were buried. We feel that as the delay mounts, these claims will come to be simply written off as fabrications. Yet, even if we accept the likelihood of some exaggeration, the very fact that guns of bores not used by the police were in operation suggests the use of a private army and the likelihood of the murder of a far greater number than merely 14. Likewise, the mystery surrounding the events at Shankar Samanta's house need to be unraveled, and the body count become important there too.

Situation of the Injured

We were unable to make a trip to the Tamluk hospital, though it was important. At Nandigram, we met and talked with a number of the injured. They continued to be traumatized. Many of them were crying or shaking when talking with us. The doctor at the Nandigram hospital was satisfied that all that was needed was being done. But the patients clearly had a different perception, for we were told that everyone was being given the same medicine, at which they were surprised. From comments made by the doctor, it seemed that everyone was getting was a painkiller and an antacid apiece. Mehrunnisa was in great pain, and was complaining that proper treatment was not available.



Mehrunnisa

However, we had no doctors in our team and therefore could not carry out any examination. Manasi, another injured woman in the Nandigram hospital, suggested we should distribute aid directly, as many of them were not getting proper food. Bhagirath also complained that he was not getting proper treatment. He had been sent to the hospital by a doctor who recommended an X-Ray, but the x-ray had not been done. They were getting food from relief groups, rather than from the hospital. This contrasted sharply with the newspaper reports, according to which supporters of the ruling party were claiming that these people were malingerers who were living in the hospitals and getting food at public expense. Bhagirath wanted to go home as soon as possible, as he had a number of dependents.

At Adhikaripara, the state had taken no responsibility. Treatment was dependent on voluntary medical teams coming up. No medical tests had been carried out on women complaining of rape. Jahnavi complained of acute pain, and the lack of treatment. Chabirani was suggested by a local doctor to avail of her ration card to seek an expert medical opinion at Kolkata.

On 28th, some of us went to the SSKM hospital. There, we met two of the injured hospitalized in Kolkata. They were Bhabani Giri (Victoria Ward, Bed 13) and Tapasi Das (Victoria Ward, Bed 43). Bullet splinters had not yet been removed from Bhabani Giri's shoulder and above her chest, and she was in acute pain, when we met her. Tapasi Das had a bullet hitting her hip in such a way that her urinary bladder was affected. She had been shot from behind when she was returning home. She had to have three operations, and a plastic surgery was still to come. On enquiring, we were told that medical expenses were being borne by the Trinamool Congress. Seemingly, the state was taking no responsibility for its victims. In particular, the victims are in need of psychological help and counseling, and nothing had been done by the state.

The continued terror and trauma till 25th

Our trip to Nandigram was on 25th March, eleven days after the violence. We found people still in shock and trauma. We have already mentioned the trauma of injured people. Apart from that, everywhere, people had a deep distrust of outsiders, with cameras etc. They wanted us to prove our bonafides with identity cards if possible, citing TV channels like 24 Ghanta, which were presenting their views in a totally distorted manner. Secondly, they were afraid that if we took their photos, they might be put in danger. This fear was particularly great in Sonachura, where the bulk of the people seem to have been CPI(M) supporters till fairly recently, and were all the more apprehensive of violence. People not only did not come out after dark, but even, in many cases, dared not stay at home at night, for fear of sudden attacks. In areas bordering on Khejuri or other areas strongly held by the CPI(M), people were apprehensive of moving about even in day time. A van driver near a bridge at Sonachura [on the opposite side of which was a

CPI(M) area] told us that whenever he had to pass close to CPI(M) areas, he went in mortal fear. A huge crowd at Adhikaripara told us that on 23rd March, a woman who had gone to collect kerosene was beaten up so badly that she had to be hospitalized. As before the 14th of March, complaints to the police brought no redress. Everyone was skeptical about the CID, identifying it as an instrument of the CPI(M). Schooling was in doldrums. At Sonachura, we were told that 18 candidates had been unable to sit for the Higher Secondary examinations, because their centres were in Khejuri. It was alleged that the HS Council had willfully changed the centres, after the Madhyamik Examinations, despite knowing that such changes would be harmful for Nandigram students. Schools had not held their annual examinations.

What do the people want?

Different reactions were heard. Our discussions with people at the grass roots level showed locals willing to continue the struggle to retain their land at any cost. At the same time, there was a mood of deep frustration. They were not clear what would happen next. What was disturbing was the existence of a trend, stoked by outsider “leaders”, calling for retribution. Khokon Adhikary said those locals who had joined the goonda (harmad) forces should be turned into cripples and made to beg from door to door. But what was more serious was that at a meeting organized on 25th March by the Jamait-ulema i Hind in Sonachura, in the presence of Siddikullah Chowdhury, a state level leader (photo attached) of the organization said that murder should be replied by murder, rape by rape.



Delivering Inflammatory Speech

Attitudes also varied from area to area. Women at Sonachura and Garchakraberia were vocal and showed a greater willingness to mobilize again. At Adhikaripara the stress of the women was on peace and an end to the conflicts. In general, women seemed to feel that they had equal space at the Bhumi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee. But our questions about future strategy tended to show that such decisions would be taken by the men. The decision to place women up front had been based on the perception that they were weaker. Even women who agreed that they should go ahead did so by adopting a patriarchal standpoint, that it was less of a loss if women died. While women’s participation in the resistance is certainly a very significant component, the persistence of such patriarchal values suggests that participation does not mean equality in decision making and in rights generally. In a movement fighting for rights, this dimension cannot be swept under the carpet.

At the political level, in 2006, a CPI member had been elected MLA, and the area has traditionally been considered a left area. But people have lost faith in the Left Front, and its talk about restoring normalcy and peace. This however does not mean that people have automatically become supporters of the Trinamool Congress or the Jamait-ulema I Hind. We got an impression by talking to many of the victims as well as the common

people that BUPC provided them with a platform for raising their voices against the unilateral decision to take over land for industrialization. Buddadev Mondal, who helped our team in all its work, described himself as a non-party independent activist. A lot of women said that there with the BUPC while also acknowledging their leftist politics.

A question that needs to be clarified is, what will be the situation of the people, whatever their exact number, who are in camps at Khejuri. Given the threats uttered by some people at least, it seems to be a difficult proposition to enable those people to return to Nandigram. While making a clear distinction between state violence and popular violence, we also need to interrogate violence within civil society. Accordingly, investigation is needed in Khejuri as well, instead of depending solely on information given in Nandigram.

One observation we had was, people in Nandigram wanted outsiders to come, and listen to their views and experiences. While they had suspicions about outsiders who played shady roles, mentioning clearly certain newspapers and TV channels, generally they welcomed us and talked to us at length, giving us their views.

Report prepared by Debasish Sen, Kunal Chattopadhyay, Kuntal Ghosh, Maroona Murmu, Safiul Mollick, and Soma Marik (members of Teachers and Scientists Against Maldevelopment – TASAM, in their private capacity).