

UTTRAKHAND PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO : AN OVERVIEW

The elections to the Legislative assembly of Uttarakhand (previously Uttaranchal), the second since its formation as a separate State, were held two years ago in February 2007. As a precursor to the assembly elections, a series of dialogues was organized to identify the core issues, which should become the focal point of the polity in the region. These dialogues were attended by the representatives of various movement groups, academic institutions, social and political organizations from across the country. Based on the conclusions reached at such meetings, this Paper was prepared and it was called the People's Manifesto. The Organizations which helped in compiling the Manifesto include: Uttarakhand Lok Vidya Peeth, Himalaya Swaraj Abhiyan, Janadhikar Manch (Almora), Aman Trust (Almora), C.G.P. Uttarakhand, Siddh (Mussorie), Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam, SADED and Samta Aandolan etc.

The Main features of the Uttarakhand People's Manifesto were divided into three parts:- (1.) Delimitations (*Pariseeman*) and Electoral System (2.) Developmental Works, State Departments and Facilities (3.) Natural Resources and Assets

(1.) Delimitations (*Pariseeman*) and Electoral System

Delimitation

- The geo-ecological-cultural- administrative-electoral boundaries should be convergent as far as allowed by other variables such as demography. While undertaking the delimitation, consideration of ecological fragility, unity of watershed should be a central consideration and not demographic proportion.
- In the planning, we have to get rid of our colonial blinkers while drafting people's manifestos. For example, in the entire hilly regions of India, use of pesticides and fertilizers was not in vogue and the organic farming was the norm and not the exception. Similarly, folk-healers, herbal medicine practitioners, the peasants who knew soil variation and weather or the mothers who knew about the nutritive values of food or its compatibility with the weather, are not adequately appreciated as knowledge system. More importantly, low energy and non-energy consuming livelihood have become very critical in the context of global warming. So while planning about the industrialization and economic development, these factors should remain central consideration.
- Presently, there does not seem to be any effective coordination amongst the various administrative units (starting from Village Panchayat and then going upwards via Nyaya Panchayat, Development Blocks, Tehsil, Districts, Divisions) of the State.
- Not only that the separate departments like forests, water, irrigation, agriculture, education, roads, transport, health, land reforms, police have no coordination with each other, their areas of jurisdiction is very irrational and unfriendly. For a single

task, a villager might have to go to several departments situated in far off places from each other. Moreover, this kind of irrational delimitation causes avoidable delays in the developmental works.

- It is imperative that there should be workable coordination amongst various administrative arms that may be divided into five units or circles namely State, District, Development Block, Nyaya Panchayat and Gram Sabha and all developmental and administrative activities should be confined to these five circles to ensure speedy execution of developmental works.
- The elections should be organized in the State based on the above five Circles and the revised delimitations should be based on the cultural and geographical homogeneity of the areas to ensure that governance is based on the traditional knowledge acquired over the years by shared experience. The people feel empowered if the systems governing them emanate from their own thought process.

Electoral Process

- In the present electoral system, the possibility exists that a candidate wins the elections even on the basis of less than 20% votes polled, as normally the voting percentage is around 60 to 65 per cent. The election can be won by taking care of only one or two groups or segments of populace and ignoring the rest. To avoid this, the elections should be declared void if the polling percentage is less than 80% and later, with the process of elimination, the contest should be brought between the two most popular candidates.
- The Nomination should be filled at least nine months before the elections to ensure that only real good candidates remain in the fray as nine months is adequate time for the voter to take an informed decision as to which way his vote should go.
- As stated above, in the hilly areas, the delimitation of Gram Sabhas and Nyaya Panchayat should be based more on the basis of geo-ecological factors and less on the demographic profile of the area.
- The Gram Sabha should be elected by the direct voting. There should be a Nyaya Sabha, formed by a group of 10 Gram Sabhas.
- The State of Uttarakhand should be divided into 70 Developmental Blocks – in fact, each Assembly constituency should be considered as a separate developmental block instead of 15 blocks presently being practiced. The Member of the Legislative Assembly would be responsible for the development of his block and the administrator of that area should be made to work under the guidance of the elected representative of the area.

- The head of the Nagar Panchayat should also be elected through direct voting.
- The voters should be given the right to recall the elected representative from the level of Gram Panchayat to Legislative Assembly.
- There would be a People's Commission for Manifesto Monitoring which would oversee the execution of the promises made in the manifesto by the group in power.
- A code of conduct for the people's representatives should be formulated to ensure that the representative would resign if he is found involved in any criminal activity, or any corrupt practice or acceptance of commission/graft etc. Similarly, under this code of conduct, he would be bound to be present for at least two days in a week and 180 days in a year in the office/offices of his constituency. He will not misuse the official transport or office space etc, for his personal or party use.

(2.) Developmental Works, State Departments and Facilities

- In the present system, the administrative officer is not bound to go by the advice of the elected representative and all the decisions regarding developmental works from village to district are taken by the officers. As stated above, the multiplicity of departments also causes lot of delays and confusion. It would be appropriate if the District Magistrate is designated as District Secretary and should be made to go by the advice of the elected persons in all the developmental related matters.
- The number of departments should be reduced and except for the segments like Police, judiciary, revenue, education and health, all other departments like drinking water, irrigation, water resources, agriculture, land reforms, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and forest land (Jal-Jungle-Zameen) fuel and fodder, markets and public distribution etc, should be brought under a newly created department namely "Department of Natural Resources and Development". This system should work upto the level of Development Blocks.
- The division of responsibilities amongst the five units should be such that the village/district panchayats are free to take their own decisions.
- The revenue earned from various revenue sources should be distributed in the following order : Gram Panchayat 50%, Nyaya Panchayat 5%, Block Panchayat 5%, District Panchayat 20% and the State 20%.
- There should be a ban on the World Bank supported projects in the areas of public utilities like health, education and drinking water.

- The policies to earn revenue from the exploitation of natural resources and excise duty on liquor should be discouraged.

(3.) Natural Resources and Assets

- It would be advisable if in Uttarakhand, the term 'natural resources' is replaced with the term 'natural assets' and a comprehensive policy is framed based on the principles of co-existence and sustainability.
- The existence of water, forest and land (Jal-Jungle-Zameen) is intertwined and dependent on one another. Therefore, it is imperative that their policies are framed in a holistic manner so as to make them complementary to each other.
- Jal-Jungle-Zameen would not be made the resources to earn revenue and these would be regarded as basic elements to sustain life. These resources would be managed by the Gram Sabhas/Local Bodies and at least 50% of the management work relating to Jal-Jungle-Zameen would be entrusted to women. The records of these assets would be with the local bodies which will also keep the records of rainfall and other water bodies. No private or multinational company would be allowed to encroach upon these areas in the name of investments or development.
- The Water Policy would be based on the premise that every living being will have the right to free drinking water.
- The water would be owned by the local populace and its conservation would be undertaken on the basis of traditional knowledge and cultural values of the area. The conservation should be undertaken by rain harvesting, planting of trees with broad leaves and such measures as are being used by the local people traditionally.
- The consent of the elected local body would be required before allowing the use of water resources for outside the area.
- Historically, it has been observed that Dalits and marginalized sections of the society are not given their due rights on the water resources. It would be ensured that these sections get the equal rights on water.
- A uniform land policy should be enacted in the State and the Kumaoun Zamindari Abolition Act should be suitably amended. The Land Ceiling Act should be implemented effectively in the State and consolidation of land-holdings should be carried out immediately.
- The consent of the elected local body would be required before allowing any mining activity in the area. No large scale mining activity in

Uttrakahnd should be allowed in view of the already depleting water resources.

- Small scale mining activity for the local needs should be allowed only through the local means which used to take care of fragile ecology of the area.
