

**INDIAN PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL (IPT)
On Environment and Human Rights**

14 June 2005

PRESS NOTE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SANGH PARIVAR DERAILS TRIBUNAL ON COMMUNALISM IN ORISSA, THREATENS
WOMEN MEMBERS**

The Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights (IPT) has been traveling throughout the state as part of its investigations on communalism in Orissa. The primary investigations of the Tribunal took place from June 11-14, 2005. While conducting a hearing with Hindu nationalist organizations on June 14th, at 11 am, at the Red Cross Bhavan in Bhubaneswar, Sangh Parivar members verbally attacked Tribunal members, made false, defamatory, and inflammatory statements, sought to seize information gathered during the investigations, and shouted threats, including the promise to rape attending female members of the Tribunal.

The event began without incident. Invited representatives of the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) came to offer testimonies. The first person to depose was Mr. Ramachandra Behera, a journalist representing the Media News Agency and also a supporter of the Bajrang Dal. Tribunal members had taken his consent for tape-recording the testimony. Sangh Parivar members Mr. Bansidhar Pradhan, Mrs. Padmaja and Ms. Mamta Mallik also deposed. During the depositions these persons received a fax from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Orissa. The fax was given to Tribunal members by Sangh Parivar members.

The fax made allegations against the Tribunal, its conduct, and against persons associated with it. The note stated that that IPT was, "[a] self-appointed body composed wholly of leftists, fellow travellers, all known Hindu baiters." The note of the VHP was signed by the Organizing Secretary, and included allegations against Dr. Angana Chatterji, a professor of anthropology, who has been working with advocacy research in Orissa since 1995, and teaches in San Francisco, stating that "the inclusion of an NRI well known for anti-Hindu activities in the US suggests foreign funds from sources bent on destabilizing the country." There is no merit to these allegations. The Indian People's Tribunal has provided all funding for costs related to the Tribunal in Orissa. No private funds or grants were solicited, and participation by all members is on a voluntary basis and in their capacity as individuals. ITP and the individuals participating on the Tribunal are all highly respected, and of immense credibility.

After receiving the fax, Sangh Parivar members demanded that Tribunal members give them the two micro cassettes recording their session. Tribunal members attempted to reason with them and persuade them to leave the tapes in the Tribunal's custody, stating that the Sangh Parivar testimonial was necessary to the Tribunal's work and that the Sangh Parivar members who deposed had done so with informed consent. Sangh Parivar members aggressively responded to Justice Usha and Justice Mehta. To Dr. Chatterji, Sangh Parivar members said that they know of her "vicious activities". Sangh Parivar members insisted menacingly and threateningly that the tapes with information gathered by the Tribunal be returned. If the tapes were not given to them, they stated that they would ensure their possession by using any means necessary. Dr. Chatterji, who had custody of the tapes, destroyed them in front of Parivar members. At this time, approximately 9 Sangh Parivar members gheraoed the Tribunal members present and the IPT staff. At that time, barring Justice Mehta, all the other Tribunal members (Justice Usha, Dr. Chatterji, Dr. Hans) and staff (Ms. Sameena Dalwai, Ms. Priyanka Josson and Ms. Maya Nair) in the room were women.

The Tribunal members present took a decision, given the escalated and tense situation, to leave the hearings and cancel the meetings scheduled for the rest of the day.

Outside, Sangh Parivar members became increasingly abusive and violent in their speech, shouting, "this is an IPT funded by the foreign funding agencies to tarnish the image of the Hindu Rashtra and we will rape those women". When the Tribunal staff was leaving, one of the Sangh Parivar members said that: "We will parade them naked". Ms. Mallik of the Sangh Parivar also forcibly took a picture on her mobile phone of Dr. Chatterji, saying that: "we will make sure that everybody knows your face". The Parivar members also took down the vehicle numbers of the Tribunal.

Tribunal members regret and would like to strongly deplore the high-handed and aggressive actions of the Sangh Parivar that has now derailed the Tribunal process.

The Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights was constituted by a people's mandate in 1993 to investigate human rights violations and cases of environmental degradation. The IPT is particularly concerned about cases that affect the lives and livelihood of a vast majority of urban and rural poor. The IPT process endeavours to inquire into the exact nature of a problem, and provide a true picture by providing a space for all the concerned parties to present their views.

The Tribunal is headed by Justice K.K. Usha, Former Chief Justice, Kerala High Court, and Justice R.A. Mehta, Former Acting Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court, and Former Director, Gujarat Judicial Academy.

The Tribunal is convened by Dr. Angana Chatterji, Associate Professor, Anthropology, California Institute of Integral Studies, and Mr. Mihir Desai, Indian People's Tribunal and Advocate, Mumbai High Court and Supreme Court of India.

Other Tribunal Members are Dr. Chetan Bhatt, Reader, Sociology, Goldsmiths College, University of London; Dr. Asha Hans, Professor, Women's Studies, Utkal University; Ms. Lalita Missal, National Alliance of Women-Orissa Chapter; Dr. Shaheen Nilofer, Scholar-activist from Orissa; Mr. Sudhir Patnaik, Scholar-activist from Orissa; Dr. Ram Puniyani, EKTA, Committee for Communal Amity.

In case you have any further inquiries about the process or you wish to communicate to us your decision to depose before the panel then you may contact me (contact information below), or the co-convenors of the Indian People's Tribunal on Communalism in Orissa, Dr. Angana Chatterji at 9937413370 or achatterji@ciis.edu and/or Mr. Mihir Desai at iptindia@vsnl.net.

Yours sincerely,

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