

AN INTRODUCTION TO P U D R

“हमें लड़ना नहीं -
 किसी प्रतीक के लिए
 किसी नाम के लिए
 किसी बड़े प्रोग्राम के लिए
 हमें लड़नी है एक छोटी सी लड़ाई
 छोटे लोगों के लिए
 छोटी बातों के लिए”

In post independent India, after the emergency, civil rights movement has emerged as an autonomous voice in defence of civil liberties and democratic rights of our people. The present organisation is a reflection of this trend. It came into existence during the later part of the emergency as the Delhi Unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties & Democratic Rights (PUCL & DR). 1 February 1981, it became People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR).

In the last eight years of its existence the organisation has taken up for specific investigation thirty two instances of violation of democratic rights. Nine of them are in co-ordination with other civil rights organisations which include PUCL, APCLC, CPDR, APDR and others. All its investigative reports have been published. These thirty two investigations cover Andhra Pradesh (3), Assam (1), Bihar (7), Haryana (3), Kerala (1), Manipur (1), Maharashtra (2), Madhya Pradesh (4), Punjab (1), Uttar Pradesh (3) and Delhi (6). They record the role of state agencies in the violation of democratic rights of the people concerned. The government in power at the time of the investigations include Janata Party (5), Left Front (1), Telugu Desam (1), and the rest Congress (I). In many instances the people whose rights have been violated are not under any particular political leadership (15). A number of them are under the leadership of autonomous local groups (5). The rest include BJP (1), Naxalites and their mass organisations (9), CITU (1) and HMS (1). The people include agrarian poor (6), tribals (4) unorganised workers (1), industrial workers (7), slum dwellers (2), minorities (3), artists (1), beggars (2), political activists (1), harijans (1) and the rest (5) are general population. A number of people from different walks of life have participated in these fact finding missions. The investigations include 20 academicians, 15 journalists, 5 advocates and 1 doctor.

In addition to the investigation of specific cases, PUDR has also taken up issues of general importance which include two reports on women, one report each on forest policy, unorganised workers, Disturbed Areas Act, and on the state of democratic rights in the country. PUDR also brought out critiques of new or proposed legislations which affect democratic rights of people. They include Hospitals and other Institutions Bill, the new amendment to the Central Industrial Security Force Act, the Terrorist Affected Areas (special courts) Act and the UGC's proposal for a University Security Force.

Initially in 1977 we held a convention on political prisoners. Later PUDR took up other issues of importance through its annual conventions. They include "Science, Culture and Democratic Rights", "Legal System, Judiciary and Democratic Rights" and "Mines, Mechanisation and People".

PUDR is also actively engaged in legal defence of civil liberties and democratic rights. It has taken up over a hundred cases in the last eight years. Of constitutional importance has been the judgement given on PUDR's Asiad labour petition which opened the doors to public interest litigation. At present PUDR is engaged in a number of cases of importance to the rights of our people.

Financially, in the initial years when the scale of activities was relatively low, the organisation financed itself with the help of donations from individual members. In later years the annual expenditure stabilised itself at around Rs.20,000. About 40% of the expenditure is financed by the sale of our booklets, another 40% from membership fee and monthly donations from members. The rest of the amount comes in the form of donations from the public, largely collected in public meetings.

Today, a decade after the declaration of emergency, the civil rights movement is facing a severe threat. The rights of those who defend the rights of the people are being violated. Irresponsible allegations against civil rights organisations are being made by those in power. It is in a grim context like this that PUDR presents its record. And leaves it to the judgement of the people.