

The War Within

Government is the problem, not the solution. And yet there is no option but to appeal to the government to resolve the burning problem of recent times—the Maoist problem—because Maoism has already acquired the centre-stage in Indian drama. Unprecedented price rise is not an issue of substance. Also, they don't talk much about poverty alleviation these days. Nor do jobless millions pose any serious threat to the establishment. The whole political discourse in the government and the media hovers around Maoist danger, rather growing Maoist violence and sympathy of a section of civic society towards the Maoist cause. Whether peace proposal offered by the Citizens Initiative for Peace can make the dialogue between the government and the naxalites (or Maoists) possible is open to question. The reason is simple : the government is not going to stop offensive while asking the Maoists to disarm and surrender. Concerned Citizens' forum is for unconditional dialogue but the government needs to recognise that the pragmatic Maoist problem-solving that people across the country so desperately want from the persons in authority presupposes a comprehensive narrative about the non-violent role of government. They are still in a dilemma as to how not to talk while feigning for talk.

Encouraged by the Nepalese syndrome of maoist co-option in what they call mainstream politics Manmohan Singhs and Chidambarams are half-heartedly talking about the necessity of dialogue with the naxalites and comprehensive development plan for tribal areas. The maoists of Nepal bargained from a position of strength, it is not really the case for Indian maoists. And the maoists themselves know it better. As a result no lasting peace is likely to emerge from the peace initiative launched by the concerned citizens.

For one thing 'maoist danger' is solely identified with tribal discontent as if the maoist party has no agenda other than liberating the poor tribals. Maybe, it is a ploy to politically isolate the maoists from broad masses. Maybe not. Strangely enough, all are talking in unison, they see the 'maoist crisis' through the tribal prism and dish out their valuable suggestions about the upliftment of tribal people.

While addressing a conference of chief ministers and tribal affairs ministers in New Delhi on November 4, prime minister Mannohan Singh acknowledged in no uncertain terms the 'systematic failure' in ensuring the progress of tribals. Also, he assured his countrymen from the same platform that he would like to rectify that. Incidentally the all important announcement came in the wake of a maoist bandh in Orissa and in parts of West Bengal—Junglemahal—inhabited by the tribals. Not that it was the first time prime minister admitted how the government had failed the tribals over the years. He and his fellow travellers are accepting their fault more vociferously than ever before because "the alienation built over the decades is taking a dangerous turn." He was emphatic enough to declare that the systematic exploitation of tribal communities won't be tolerated.

Whether his chief ministers and tribal affairs ministers are serious enough to subscribe to his idea is a different matter.

Coming from the Prime Minister himself the statement gives the nation an impression that man at the top is after all humane, and is willing to set the house

in order. It looks as if the apathy and crime that the civilised India, and that includes the Corporate India, has been inflicting on the tribals will come to an end. But it is often said that if dreams were horses, beggars would ride.

After taking over the mantle for the first time he had in one of his speeches said that there were 161 districts which were afflicted with Maoism. Today, nearly a third of India, close to 235 districts, are faced with Maoist violence. These people have picked up the gun, not because they are trigger-happy, but because of the decades of oppression and suppression that they have been subjected to. It cannot be otherwise when someone is driven to the wall, and that too for ages.

The ruthless exploitation has gone on for generations, and picking up the gun comes as a last resort, and one must accept that it is because of failure as a society that the tribals are on a warpath. No amount of fire-fighting or sending the army to fight the tribals in the guise of Maoists is going to be helpful.

True, "no sustained activity is possible under the shadow of the gun," as the Prime Minister stated the other day. But no 'sustained activity' is possible when the government on the one hand is busy facilitating the process of continued exploitation of the tribal lands, and at the same time bringing in economic culture that displaces the tribals and forces them to sell their daughters and wives to survive the State onslaught.

It is the government's economic policies that are alienating the tribals. The Special Economic Zones (SEZ) for instance that the Congress-led UPA government is aggressively pushing, the massive land acquisitions that the government is again thriving on, the usurping of the traditional rights of the tribal communities and above all the systematic destruction of sustainable agriculture all over the country, is primarily responsible for growing violence. The Centre's soft stance despite deployment of special task forces, cobra units, anti-naxalite squads to combat the 'maoist menace' while giving lip service to winning hearts and minds of tribals, ultimately relies on exterminating dissenters whether they are known as local maoists, outside naxalites or simply "terrorists". But more security offensive means they are going to alienate themselves further from the tribals whose hearts and minds they hope to win. □□□