

## **“Are You A Naxal Sympathizer?”**

**Shah Alam Khan**

The recent upsurge in Naxal violence has led the Hon Home Minister of India, Mr P Chidambaram to put a difficult question to the intelligentsia of this country, “Are you a Naxal Sympathizer?”, he asked all those who showed any feeling, occult or open, in sympathizing with the red brigade. The question leaves little room for answer and even little space for people, who do sympathize with those who have been deprived and protest, sans violence. Doesn't it sound very much like George W Bush bellowing “Either you are with us or you are with them”? George Bush's question and subsequently Chidambaram's query smother all breathing space in the middle path of rationality. Such provocative, “agenda-setting” questions are not without meaning. Not only do they smother rationality on one end, they justify the use of unfair, undemocratic and violent means of crushing all forms of remonstrance on the other.

The question itself answers what the people of 'shining India' (and not Bharat) want to listen. What more should one expect from Mr Chidambaram, the lawyer who at one time represented the controversial British Mining giant Vedanta Resources and the American energy firm Enron.

To an ordinary Indian, the Naxal movement is the end result of years of repression of local people, loot of local resources and violation of fundamental rights. Police atrocities combined with a feudal, caste based hierarchy has only made things worse. The gross neglect and disregard of adivasis and tribals of India by 'rulers' has resulted in the present state of affairs. Only if the authorities would have provided a just and democratic system of equivalence, things would have been different. Unfortunately it is difficult for a Harvard educated P Chidambaram, to comprehend the tragedy called life which the adivasis of India lead everyday.

It is true that there is no place for violence in the India of Gandhi. Violence is to be condemned, abhorred and dismissed. Violence, whatever the cause, has always been a reason to question the sanctity of the Naxal movement. But how justified is it in a democracy for a state to use force against its own people? Mr Chidambaram's contemplation in using Army and Air-force in dealing with the Naxals stands to be condemned. Who is not aware of the so-called “collateral damage” during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars? The phenomenal loss of life in the cloak of collateral damage has been heart rending. Can Mr Chidambaram assure against any such “collateral damage” in this one sided offensive? What have people learnt from their experiences in the North East and Kashmir? Why are they depending more and more on force to handle critical, people based issues? Why can't they address the problems which breed Naxals? Is this the beginning of end of democratic debate in this country?

Another important aspect of this debate is the sudden haste in tackling a problem the roots of which go way back to the 1940s and 50s. The sincerity of the present government in providing instant, cold blooded solution to the Naxal problem is suspect. The recent economic downturn and its financial implications have made India a hot bed for cheap resources. Everything comes cheap in India. Men, women, children, iron-ore, coal, water, forest, climate. The list is endless. Plundering of resources is easy. Even easier is the

mismanagement of ecology, people included. It is this loot of nature and man which is resented by locals and it is this resentment which is uncomfortable to India's political class. It doesn't require rocket science to conclude that the nexus of political class and India Inc is the main beneficiary from this symbiosis of life and death. No wonder the political class wants to finish off any form of confrontation to this unabated pilferage.

It's high time that the common Indian stand and be counted. The malicious political agenda which thrives on human blood has to be contained. Today they want to use force on Naxals, tomorrow it could be liberals, democrats, human rights activists and non-partisan academics. There is no justification of using violence against violence. Examples from across the globe have shown that violence breeds hatred and hatred breeds violence. The cycle of hate and violence swallows innocent human lives. If the Naxal violence is unjustified what reason do government leaders have to give laurels to those who defend violent oppression of this movement?

The choices of sympathizing with masses represented by Naxals are limited. The rulers of this country should wake up to the realities of Bharat or it would be too late to contain this so-called menace. Hungry people are more dangerous than the most ferocious of hounds.