

NOTE

Who Rules India?

Devinder Sharma writes :

At a time when the rise of Maoism that people witness across the country, more than a hundred representatives of various people's movements and social campaigns came together in a meeting held at Swaraj Vidyapeeth campus, Allahabad, on March 27-28. They discussed India's present crisis in depth. It was unanimously decided that all people's movements and social campaigns should come together to launch a nationwide people's movement to face the present challenges.

The heard reality is that, the Indian political leadership (and to quite an extent that of the national media as well) is actually serving the commercial interest of big business. Somehow an impression is being given, and the urban middle class laps it up, that the people who have picked up guns are the new breed of terrorists, and that the bullet is the only answer.

It was at this conference that the well-known RTI activist Arvind Kejriwal made some observations, recalling a few incidents from the days when he was working in the Income Tax department. It gives people an insight into the ways of corporate swindle, that actually is at the base of the present crisis.

"We raided more than 80 MNCs and caught all the foreign managers. They used to show lower salaries and evade taxes in India. Companies like Sony, Mitsubishi, etc., evaded crores of rupees in taxes. When we recorded their statement they said they did not know our laws. When we raided the Nippon airways executive, we recovered minutes of their meeting from his bag which has mentioned that when any Japanese official comes to India, he should not show his salary more than Rs 10 lakh. When we raided the Denso India executive, he threatened us—we are here to help your poor country, we control your Parliament and we can get any law passed. I didn't believe it at that time. We will get all you transferred.

"Three days after the Japanese ambassador met the finance minister and told that they will withdraw all aid if these people are not transferred, and we were transferred. When UPA ministry was falling, then all MPs were saleable and I felt that there is no price of our vote. I felt that the US can buy them and Japan also.

"When the Nuclear Liability Bill was introduced, it said that the total liability of any operator company will be 500 crore rupees only. When we see all things together, we are confronted with a horror story that our country is not independent. As long as we do not control our country, our Parliament will keep making 100 such laws in a day. So this is not democracy. We should strive for direct democracy. A law should not be passed unless it is approved by two-thirds of the gram sabhas. As long as gram sabhas or mohalla sabhas, i.e., primary-level local communities do not get the control, things will not change."

In another interview published in the *Deccan Herald* (April 25, 2010), entitled : "Gram Sabha should be empowered," Arvind talks about the need to empower the gram sabhas, in the absence of which people are losing faith in the system of governance and might take up arms "or even join Maoists as it had happened in Lohandigoda in Chhatisgarh".

Following is what Arvind says in response to a question :

“If you don’t empower people at the grass-roots level, they will turn to naxalism. Like it happened in the villages of Lohandigoda in Chhatis-garh, where the Tata group had sought permission from the government to set up a Sponge iron plant. From the State Government level to the mukhiya, the proposal was cleared. But the local people were up in arms and were in no mood to give up their land or allow cutting of trees. So they submitted a 15-point charter of demands which included plantation of five saplings for each tree cut. But their demand was rejected out-right. Eventually, the entire 13 villages reportedly turned to naxalism.”

What Arvind narrates is a true reflection of the flawed development model that is being thrust upon the people. It is therefore very important that the nation wakes up to the realities, and does not unleash a war against its own people who are victims of the 'process of development' that has been aggressively unleashed since June 1991.

The dark underbelly of Tata’s and for that matter scores of Indian and foreign business concerns is at the root of the naxal uprising. The government cannot muffle the voices of the people by setting up a school here or a health centre there under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a concept that the UN promotes. The corporate social responsibility must begin where it actually sows the seeds of revolt. The need therefore is to empower Gram Sabhas, and to ensure that the decision of the village through the democratic process is final and binding. Even the Prime Minister should not have the right to over-rule the decisions of the Gram Sabhas. □□□