

## Politics of Polarisation

Why is there a rise of left-wing extremism in some proverbially backward region? Can tribals be good without Maoists? Intellectuals and progressives, having no compulsion to champion any party line, have been discussing the issue for quite some time without reaching any consensus on how to participate in a changing world in struggle. Bringing a unified voice to the current discourse about violence and counter-violence, shrinking democratic space and future of the poorest of the poor is as difficult today as it was yesterday when Nehruvian democracy didn't face any Maoist onslaught. In the intensifying conflict between the state and the Maoists, is the only choice to take one side or the other? In the absence of total polarisation there are always other options. And civic society, otherwise divided over the on-going civil war in central India and elsewhere, is in reality trying to explore the third option maintaining equidistance from both extremes. They are crying for justice while injustice is the order of the day. They are asking Maoists to refrain from conducting further offensive so that tribals may get some breathing space and don't die in cross-fire. The cross-fire theory is propagated mainly by the mainstream media while mystifying tribal belief and examining how even in most oppressive conditions tribals refuse to break with the status quo.

But tribal rebellions throughout the history of India tell a different tale. In the yester years there were no Maoists. No political intervention from outside. And yet autonomous revolts got defeated in no time though all these movements created social mobility and consciousness for the next phase of rebellion. The violent past helped them raise their sights. This time tribals revolted against the attacks on their livelihoods and objective condition was such that Maoist intervention was logical to sustain resistance against the mighty state and fill up the subjective vacuum. Had not the Maoists intervened, the struggle for survival could have been crushed much earlier. The Maoist presence is delaying the victory of armed forces over a community that has nothing to lose other than shame and drudgery. In many cases tribals themselves invited the naxalities because no political party was interested in defending their case of survival. Even in the seventies the naxalites intervened in isolated resistance pockets of tribals with a view to developing a unified rebellious platform. During the Tebhaga movement many peasant upsurges were spontaneous, without the active leadership of the then undivided communist party. In fact in some cases the party was invited by the revolting sharecroppers to take leadership and guide them. The Maoists cannot influence the events in tribal belts simply by showing gunpower. It's a life-and-death question of thousands of tribal families that keeps the Maoist campaign going despite periodic setbacks.

Unchaining the mind is not that easy. Nor will tribals accept Maoist revolutionary idea so easily though they desperately need to change the social and economic reality around them. For them any departure from the present hellish existence is regarded as revolution in their lives.

Tribals never outgrew their hatred against government functionaries and security forces, Maoist intervention or no intervention. Armed suppression of tribal aspirations is essentially a kind of ethnic cleansing but it seems to be the only means for the powers that be to combat voice of dissent. Nor can it be the sole means by which to address politically motivated Maoist campaign. Status quoism stands in the way of emancipation of tribal communities. Maybe, Maoism is a welcome relief for the deaf and dumb who have been voiceless for generations. Maybe not. Tribals are human beings. And as human beings they have the right to develop as critical thinkers and explore alternative solutions to the plight of their communities.

After a long lull the political atmosphere in India looks now charged with both deep animosities and new hopes for bettering the world. With the spread of civil war and civil defiance against institutionalised violence, fear, murder and imprisonment, a political polarisation is taking place, slowly but steadily. No one is safe in the leaky boat and everyone will have to take side today or tomorrow. □□□