

COMMENT

‘Encounter’ and ‘Encounter’

CHATTISGARH IS NOT THE ONLY state that can boast of being the notoriously efficient in engineering fake encounters to combat what they call maoist menace. Orissa is slowly but steadily catching up with Chattisgarh as state sponsored violence against landlosers and forest dwellers, tribals to be precise, is on the rise though not much is reported in the mainstream media. Orissa now figures prominently in India’s ever expanding ‘encounter zone map’.

In recent months several ‘encounters’ took place in the sensitive areas of Kashipur, Paikmal, Daitari, Tomka and Basangamali and at least 14 people, mostly poor tribals and dalits, including minor girls, were brutally murdered to allow big industrial houses—Tatas, Vedanta and others—to grab land, evict villagers and loot the vergin soil.

In the ‘Tomka encounter’ five people were shot dead by the security forces. One of the victims, as reported by a fact-finding team organised by some human rights groups was a young girl from the obscure Baligoth village. In fact the said victim had been missing since the incidents of March 2010 when police entered the villages of Kalinganagar and fired on agitating villagers who were protesting against the forceful land acquisition for a road—or common corridor. One Laxman Jamuda was killed in the firing. There was clear evidence, as reported by the fact-finding team, that the girl who was killed in false encounter, was violated, before murder.

The Basangamali Hills encounter on January 9, 2011 was a cold-blooded murder as the victims, totalling 9, were all members of a cultural squad that used to highlight the agony of Kashipur tribals through their cultural performances. After all they were not gun-totting dreaded maoists roving in the jungles. Here the industrial house in question was Vedanta group that now symbolises what Orissa today stands for—bloody industrialisation. Incidentally no police-man was injured in so many encounters. Those who die and get critically injured are unarmed civilians who have no option but to resist the state onslaught with bare hands for sheer survival.

Who bothers about the recent Supreme Court ruling given against the backdrop of Azad’s brutal murder that ‘constitutionally governed Republic India will not allow to kill its own children’? Neither state government nor central government.

Meanwhile the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) observed its foundation day on the 12th October and organised a well publicised seminar on “Prenatal sex selection in India; issues, concerns and action”. Till date only 18 states have set up the State Human Rights Commission but their record of delivering justice has been dismal. In other words many states are still outside the purview of the ‘Paris Principles’.

The ultimate goal of NHRC is said to be creating human rights culture in the country. The idea sounds fine and sincere, no doubt. But the ground reality is nowhere near the goal. The way human rights activists are being threatened by the establishment whenever they go to investigate police atrocities and fake encounters, can at worst make the goal elusive. Full Court, Full Commission, Division Benches, Single Member Benches—all these four mechanisms are being utilised by NHRC to speedily dispose of complaints but their efforts appear too inadequate to address the problem of human rights violations across the country. Nor are they serious about fake encounters that are in any case being somewhat institutionalised, thanks to bankruptcy of the political left. □□□

