

Queer Radicalism

Ruling elites have a vested interest in keeping things pretty much the way they are. And establishments believe in propping up the existing order. Poll or no poll, safe-guarding the status quo while protecting traditional institutions at any cost is the sole preoccupation of all political parties that are fighting for the heaven—the 15th parliament. But poll-boycott as a strategy seems to have lost much of its relevance and shine as well as more and more boycottists of yester years think they have no option but to contest elections to espouse their revolutionary cause, even of their kind. 'Boycott' is at best a passive resistance to the system that has failed in its mission to deliver goods and services to the people and lost credibility in every shpere. Barring the CPI (Maoist) all naxalite factions these days justify their participation in electoral process by defending the indefensible, somewhat indirectly though—the status quo. In truth they are careful not to provoke the wrath of the establishment any more than necessary. But participation in election too needs big investment without which no party can succeed even in a limited way in the rat race. As a result small parties, radical or otherwise, simply resort to tokenism by participating in elections year after year without making any headway in terms of spreading influence.

Ruling circles don't bother about local boycotts here and there, arising out of purely local issues. But they do when boycott is tagged with ideological orientation. Boycott in general is one thing but boycotting police is quite another. Police boycott by the Police Santras Birodhi Public Committee [PSBPC] in the Lalgarh area of Jangalmahal of West Bengal, bordering Jharkhand, is something unique with a potential for greater mass upsurge. They have given a call to boycott the police, not the poll. The way the poor tribals under the banner of PSBPC have been resisting the entry of police and CPM-backed goons for several months to press their long-standing demand of punishing the guilty policemen who violated their dignity and unleashed a rein of terror in the name of combing and night raid, a notorious legacy inherited by the police administration from the British Police system, has forced the arrogant marxist rulers to move in a bind.

Incidentally, the parties in power, particularly CPM, have left no stone unturned to describe the PSBPC as a frontal outfit of the maoists which it is not. Maoist violence during the poll in the neighbouring states of Bihar and Jharkhand has tempted them further to hasten the process of encircling Lalgarh and crush the tribal rebellion by using force. In recent weeks, on more than one occasion they tried to incite ethnic riots by issuing provocative statements and again their design failed much to the relief of progressives and democrats across the country. Students and intellectuals are speaking out in support of Lalgarh agitationists. But the response is too weak and feeble to be heard among broad masses. No doubt Nandigram evoked a better response from the civic society. Organisational form that has evolved from the urgency to fight police atrocities could have been more dynamic and pervasive had progressives and democrats developed support groups elsewhere as it happened at the initial phase of naxalite movement.

Surprisingly, most naxalite outfits despite their opposition to the administrative measures against the agitating tribals, did not do much beyond issuing statements—or organising a rally or two, leaving scope for the rulers to strengthen the official propaganda that the maoists were behind the movement. No doubt the authorities are creating public opinion against the poor and hapless tribals while reinforcing police and para-military forces all the time with a plan to launch the final putsch. It will be a rather tragic event if the movement fizzles out after so much sacrifice and encouraging development of people's initiative outside the ambit of party culture. Despite violent boycott in some places, the boycottists, the maoists to be precise, face the same old dilemma of convincing the people that the alternative model they are talking about is feasible.

Those who participate in election with reservation while advocating the idea of exposing the system and explaining the futility of parliamentary democracy cut a sorry figure. Their exposure remains confined to press releases which in reality have very little impact on voters. And exposure in most cases ends in business as usual rhetoric against corruption, political bankruptcy and all that. Meanwhile, global depression is shaping up to be harsh, deep and prolonged and its fall-out cannot be glossed over simply by raising some minor issues. Tribals in Lalgah and elsewhere are in reality demonstrating for their lives. Duelling over 'boycott' or 'no boycott'—it has been going on since the late '60s—cannot improve the situation. Nor can the desperate be battened away by blaming it on the maoists for all the evils under the sun. □□□