

‘NONGOVERNMENTAL POLITICS’

To be involved in politics without aspiring to govern seems to have created a new political space for those who think they have a role to play at a time when legal and administrative instruments fail. Given the growing partisan regimentation and compartmentalisation of the privileged, People’s initiative appears to be the only hope for the hapless in a hopeless situation. Everyone knows it—even those who continue to deny it. A fear-psychosis has gripped the vast masses of people because of criminalisation of politics. All are afraid to speak out because of party-police nexus. The parties in power as also the parties in opposition have developed vested interests in crippling democratic institutions to monopolise power and loot the exchequer, all in the name of holding high the banner of democracy. Most parties are rotten to the core. And yet nobody is thinking in terms of partyless democracy. Nor can democrats, liberals and advocates of radical humanism make the system more democratic and humane simply by exerting some pressure on the dispensation in a crisis situation as it is now throughout India. The death of people in police firing in Rajasthan was condemned by the marxists but they themselves failed to do so when their own police killed unarmed civilians in Nandigram.

Despite limitations people’s initiatives in defiance of existing political mandates, have justified their relevance in furthering human rights movements. Whether the persons in authority like it or not intervention by human rights bodies, both official and non-official as well, in case of violations is a fact of life. Having no mandatory power human rights bodies cannot influence governmental politics but they can certainly influence public opinion because of their wide acceptability. The parties in power have the right to ignore human rights organisations but they can hardly ignore the rights issue, thanks to popularity of civil rights movement. Too many people’s initiatives including one people’s tribunal comprising eminent citizens and jurists without any party tag, in the wake of Nandigram, cannot be anything but nongovernmental politics by other means. What non-partisan people’s initiatives seek to accomplish ranges considerably providing humanitarian aid as in the case of Nandigram carnage victims, regularly monitoring human rights violations, opposing elitist bias of policy makers and protecting the environment. The idea of people’s tribunal first got wide currency during the Vietnam war when the Bertrand Russel Tribunal tried the war crimes of American administrations. Russel’s independent initiative strengthened peace movement across the globe while isolating the mighty America to a large extent. Following the footsteps of Russel Tribunal, former Malaysian primer Dr Mahathir Mohammad has recently launched a Kualalumpur war crimes Tribunal and heard the testimony of many victims of war and occupation. It aims at influencing world opinion on the illegality of wars and occupation undertaken by major western powers. There is now a platform where victims of war crimes can lodge their complaints. Being the people’s initiative Mahathir’s tribunal differs from the International Criminal Court that does hardly try western war merchants. With genocidal suppression by authoritarian governments irrespective of their political orientation and civil war casualties rising across the globe people’s tribunal could well function at international level.

All this suggests that citizens can do something. They can do something even in areas not directly related to human rights violations—Globalisation apart, global threat to the third world poor continually emanates from global warming. That ‘human caused climate change is ‘a growing threat to society’ is a scientifically settled fact now. But what worries the concerned citizens throughout the world, particularly in the third world is how to survive the climate crisis created in the main by fossil fuel

driven industrialisation. The proposed chemical hub at Nandigram that triggered a mass upsurge and genocidal state response as well was not that innocuous even in terms of scientific feasibility. Not very long ago the International Panel on Climate Change—a collection of more than 2000 climate scientists and government representatives from around the world—expressed deep concerns over fossil-fuel based industrialisation.

In India no political party, left or right alike, has ever shown any interest in global warming while refusing to say a word or two against America—the main source of global warming. The current phase of industrialisation everywhere, not excluding India, is capital-intensive and high-tech oriented with no commitment to environment.

The debate is over reckless industrialisation, SEZ and land acquisition. SEZ means loss of livelihood of thousands of peasants. But SEZ means destruction of environment as well. Endangered environment even in the rural hamlets of Nandigram also threatens the future of the planet. Movement against global warming vis-a-vis fossil fuel based industrialisation is also a movement against America. Americans are 4 percent of the world's population but they release 25 percent of all green house gases. It remains to be seen whether people involved in non-governmental politics could address the problem of global warming as well. □□□