

A personal note on the India Social Forum

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The India Social Forum (ISF) took place in New Delhi, 9 to 13 November, 2006.

It was a gala opening ceremony. The number of participants was right and the space was appropriate. And there was something unique. It sent a message to all Forums held so far and attempted to set a trend. The entire panel in the opening plenary were women. Juxtaposed with video clips of these women in action or of the struggles they represented, we got to hear these women from the stage. The format was good but the orchestration had a deficit. Some women gave a political fiery discourse and others read scientific papers fit to be published in a journal. This was not because they were women, we have seen that happening in WSF Karachi and Mumbai.

The closing ceremony was also good. It represented the Afro-Asian solidarity. The delegates from Nairobi gave us a taste of culture which we should expect in the next WSF in Nairobi in January next year. In my opinion, a bit too much emphasis on culture.

What was between the opening and closing ceremonies was very well organized but bereft of many things. For one, the organized Left did not mobilize in advance. It was by choice, I am told. The result. There was hardly any participation of the working class, peasants, Dalits, Women's organizations and the youth.

India is a country where the Left pretends to be a universe in itself. All political parties have their own youth, working class, peasant, women and other fronts. So, for them the emerging social movements are enigma at best and an irritant at worst. How to accommodate them and how to dialogue with them.

There is a risk in India of the future social forums to become NGOized and apolitical. The Left political parties have their own agenda which is skeptical about this WSF process. The social movements are based on a single point agenda which are trying to find common grounds with other single agenda movements. Thus we see initiatives like the National Alliance of Peoples Movement (NAPM) and the All India Peoples Science Network (AIPSN). But these are coalitions of independent disconnected local initiatives trying to find common ground.

Maybe, in India we need to clean the slate and build the Forum from bottom to top. Maybe we need to learn from the successful social movements like the KSSP which demonstrated its success from an experiment in literacy from a district in Kerala, Ernakulum, which was a success story to begin with. Maybe, in India Dalits and tribals, will be more successful in

carrying this process somewhere where it will make more sense than the existing Left political parties. Afterall Indian history is a history of brahmenical exploitation.