

HUMAN RIGHTS: DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS

International politics runs on international consensus which is based on certain principles and they are held absolute and worth striving for. The inter-war and post-war years saw the world clamouring about 'making the world safe for democracy'. The locomotive of international politics has since moved to the more fundamental principle of human rights. International multilateral (and even allied) efforts have been directed in recent years towards upholding values that champion the virtues of human rights, which provide the context for genuine democracy. From Tiananmen to Kosovo, Bosnia, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq the international community has sought to intervene in areas where gross violation of human rights has taken place in recent years.

This is not to deny that there have been other strategic considerations driving multi-national (to be read apart from multilateral) interventions like in Afghanistan and Iraq. The appeals of RAWA in Afghanistan or Kurds and Shias in Iraq fell on deaf ears until strategic equations changed— in the shape of 9/11 or earlier in Saddam's attack on Kuwait— and one saw stealth and precision bombers flattening Baghdad or Kabul. This, however, does not disprove the undisputable centrality of 'human rights' as the most cherished of all human values in contemporary world. And such is the power of the appeal of the principle that even flimsy interventions in the name of human rights can silence the most vocal of nations lest it would demonstrate their sloppiness over the issue.

At another level the dynamics of international conflict has changed. There are more internal wars than international ones. The issue of 'Human Rights', which has emerged as the most inviolable of all rights at the international level, has lost its appeal in the context of internal or intra-state, intra-national conflicts, where armed non-state actors, often with active external support, have sought to challenge the authority of the state. Violence has emerged as a legitimate mode of protest for these actors who have thrived on primordial ethno-communal loyalties of people and questioned the central legitimacy of the state. In the name of group rights, self-determination, economic and cultural autonomy, these merchants of death have provoked the coercive capacity of the state and created conditions from which none of the parties can easily retreat.

The chief victim of this confrontation has been the principle of human rights. More often than not, this principle was invoked by these forces of terror to castigate the counter-terrorism efforts of the state. The sympathies of human rights activists all over the world were in most cases directed towards these groups trading terror and against the state. To be fair to them, in many cases the states did react disproportionately to such challenges to its authority. However, as international human rights regimes demonstrated greater resolve to moderate state actions in such situations, in recent years, one has seen the spiral of violence attributed to the state descend spectacularly and in majority of cases states have demonstrated their willingness to evolve genuine mechanisms of power sharing to resolve these crises. This has unfortunately been

perceived as retreat of the state and led the subversive elements to nourish false hopes of secession.

In this situation, all over the world, concerned human rights observers have shifted their attention towards these groups trading in terror. The incidence of violence (with all brutalities, target-killings) in places like Kashmir, Algeria, Afghanistan, Chechnya and elsewhere are being closely watched by international human rights activists. They have started isolating violations of human rights by the non-state actors in case of internal conflicts and there have been suggestions at different levels to pressurize these groups to accept human rights laws and observe Geneva protocols, which seek to regulate their behaviour in case of internal war-like situations. Such international pressure will certainly make these groups human-rights-sensitive. This should be coupled with international efforts to evolve enduring national, regional mechanisms for protection of human rights at the level of the state.

It is time the world should take proper note of situations where violation of Human Rights is likely and pro-active, early warning systems have to be in place to measure the threshold of political resistance in different societies/states. The states in their turn ought to take due care of issues like good governance, cultural plurality, inter-group relations etc. and strike a balance between the will to guard its integrity and the willingness to fulfill their commitment to International human rights laws or at least the universal principle of human rights.

A Note for the Readers and Subscribers

The Governing body of International Centre for Peace Studies decided in January 2003 to change the periodicity of publication of *Journal of Peace Studies* and broaden its scope and cover wider issues relating to peace and conflict. The journal is thus being published as a quarterly (once every three months) from January 2003. This change in the periodicity of the Journal will not affect the aims and objectives or quality of the Journal in any manner. The subscribers should note that there will be four issues of the Journal per year, instead of six, and the contents will increase. There is no change in the annual subscription fees, however, even if there is a slight change in the price of the individual issue of the Journal. Hope the readers will find this new edition immensely useful from the point of view of research and policy making.