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Human rights movements in India: State, civil society and beyond

Ajay Gudavarthy

This article is an attempt to trace the various phases of the human rights movement (HRM) and the assumptions underlying each of them in terms of the inter-relationships between the state, civil society and democracy. The 1970s witnessed the first phase of the HRM—the ‘civil liberties phase’—working within the framework of state-civil society complementarity. HRM along with emphasising the autonomy of institutions also struggled to recover a ‘rights based civil society’, where all citizens could have access to fundamental rights. The 1980s were marked by a shift to the second phase—the ‘democratic rights phase’—with a new state versus civil society framework. During this phase, the HRM made efforts to construct civil society as a pure ‘realm of freedom’ that stood squarely outside the state and consisted of various militant and radical social movements. Towards the end of the 1990s, the third phase—the ‘human rights phase’—reconstituted itself on a new civil society versus political society framework. The new political society stressed the importance of locating and condemning human rights violations at the civil societal level, including those committed by radical social movements. Finally, the contemporary moment is ironically striving to move beyond the political by basing itself on an abstract moral dimension.

I

Introduction

Though, since its origin, the human rights movement (HRM) in India has made significant interventions in the shaping of democratic politics, there has been, rather surprisingly, no serious reflection on the various

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shifts that it has gone through and the emerging trends, phases and discourses within it. In fact, a pertinent question, given the various new shifts, is: is there a single HRM at all in India today? Or, instead, are there multiple movements that either run parallel to each other or continue to work on mutually exclusive assumptions? It is equally significant to ask if there has been a gradual growth or decline of the HRM in terms of its overall impact since various organisations have been pulling the movement in different directions. This article attempts to trace the various phases and assumptions underlying each in terms of the inter-relationships between the state, civil society and democracy, along with locating the possible directions that the HRM might take and its implications for politics in general, and other radical social struggles in particular.

The first organised initiative, perhaps, to form a civil liberties organisation was taken by Jawaharlal Nehru on 7 November 1936, with the founding of the Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) with Rabindranath Tagore as its president. Rights were articulated not only as guarantees against the arbitrary state action that was so much a part of British colonial rule, but also as the means necessary to achieve a more just and egalitarian socio-economic order. It was this two-pronged strategy that formed the basis of the anti-colonial struggle and the various instruments it set up, including the Motilal Nehru Committee of 1928 and the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931 which adopted the resolution on fundamental rights. The strategy was a derivative of the conceptual distinction between the natural rights tradition and the positivist tradition of articulating rights. In the former, rights are envisaged as inalienable, having their origins in nature, while in the positivist tradition 'rights not only originate in the action of the state, but are also entirely dependent on it for their existence' (Singh 2005: 32). The state is the source and arbiter of rights and can therefore legitimately even take them away in certain rare and well-specified situations. The civil liberties phase of the HRM movement in the 1970s was primarily engaged with the state and was followed by the democratic rights phase around the natural rights tradition. The latter was looking to carve an autonomous civil societal sphere to locate and enlarge the scope of the language of rights.¹

¹ See Aswini Ray (2003) for a more detailed historical narrative, as well as the collection of papers submitted to the Indian civil liberties conference held in Madras on 16–17 July 1949, titled 'Civil Liberties In India', Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. I am thankful to Ujjwal Kumar Singh for suggesting this important collection.

The history of the post-independence HRM in India can be traced back to the early 1970s. The movement of the 1970s was located in a liminal zone, between the shift from the Nehruvian era to Mrs Indira Gandhi coming to power and the emergence of an authoritarian state on the one hand, and the continued expectations from a welfarist state responsive to the popular demands of the polity and its marginalised, on the other. More than opposition to the state and the constitutional framework, it was the everyday misuse of institutions and the violation of procedures that formed the context for the beginning of the post-independence HRM in India.

II

State–civil society complementarity

In a meeting of Sarvodaya workers held in Bangalore in July 1972, Jayaprakash Narayan advocated that a broad-based organisation should be formed for the preservation and strengthening of democracy in India and that the organisation should consist of all those who cherished democratic values, but were not interested in power politics (Tarkunde 1991: 303). In an all-India conference convened in Delhi on 13–14 April 1974, a non-party organisation called the Citizens For Democracy (CFD) was formed with the objective of ensuring *independence* and *autonomy*, for purposes of democratic and constitutional functioning, of various institutions such as the judiciary, press, radio, bureaucracy, the office of the President, the Election Commission and the Planning Commission, among others. This experiment of building a pressure group for the more effective and responsive functioning of state institutions was abruptly cut short with the imposition of Emergency in the country on 25 June 1975 under Article 352 of the Constitution on the grounds that the ‘security and integrity of India was in grave peril due to internal disturbance’.² Jayaprakash Narayan and many of his followers were placed under preventive detention. After his release, there appeared to be a need to expand the scope of the CFD in order to protect the civil liberties or fundamental rights of the *citizens*. In a well-attended conference held in New Delhi

² Bipin Chandra (2003) completely ignores the role of JP in building the civil liberties movement, and therefore reaches a one-sided conclusion that ‘Total Revolution’ had fascist tendencies.

in October 1976, J.B. Kriplani, in the absence of Jayaprakash Narayan, inaugurated the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) (Tarkunde 1991: 305).

The focus of the PUCL, given the immediate context of the Emergency and the recent memory of the larger legacy of the Nehruvian era, was limited to (a) the restoration of the rights curtailed or eliminated during the Emergency (undoing the preventive detention law, curtailment of the jurisdiction of the courts, censorship of the press, and so on); (b) punishment for those responsible for excesses, through available legal recourse; and (c) safeguards against taking arbitrary recourse to Emergency provisions out of mere subjective considerations (Ram 1986: 91).

The PUCL was constituted by political figures and sections close to the Janata Party, apart from the Radical Humanist Association and the professional bodies of lawyers, academics and a few independent Gandhians. More than activism and mass mobilisation, the thrust was upon drawing in eminent personalities who could exert pressure, moral or otherwise, on individuals and institutions. The issue of civil rights, which had political connotations, was considered essentially legal and therefore legal action was often considered the most effective method for making institutions responsive and for protecting the rights of the common people, the citizens of the country. State institutions like the judiciary were considered effective representatives of both civil societal concerns and public policy.

On 23 March 1977, the Janata Party came to power after the Emergency was lifted. Subsequently, the HRM temporarily lost its direction as most office bearers of PUCL who had played an important role were also members of the Janata Party. Ostensibly there existed no clear and effective distinction between the state and civil society. And since it was institutional reforms and the restoration of fundamental rights alone that was the focus, the need for an independent human rights organisation was no longer felt. In fact, 'at a national convention held in August 1977, top Janata leaders, like Krishna Kant, declared that there was hardly any need for a civil liberties movement as democrats had come to power' (CPDR 1991: 284). After a gap of a few years and with the return of Mrs Gandhi to power, the PUCL was revived in November 1980. A national convention of civil rights workers converted the PUCL into a membership organisation. V.M. Tarkunde took over as president, while Arun Shourie

became its general secretary and Professor Rajni Kothari was elected as president of the Delhi unit. Their immediate concern, following the earlier focus on institutions, was to draft a new Prison Act and Jail Manual.

This was in many ways the first phase of the HRM—the civil liberties phase—working within the framework of *state-civil society complementarity*. Organisations such as the PUCL perceived themselves as harbingers of the emerging link between the state and civil society in a newly formed nascent democracy. They were of the firm belief that:

the link works both ways: on the one hand, these groups [such as the PUCL—my addition] breed ideas and give impulse to the system; on the other hand, the political system sets and modifies the frame of action for civil society. There is a constant flow and exchange between the two spheres (Frevort 2005: 68).

Civil society was being mobilised, not to stand outside the state, but to make the state more responsive and recognise its constitutional obligations towards its citizens. It was understood that while a vibrant civil society is necessary to make the state accountable, it was equally important to recognise that the state and its policies legitimately determine how far the self-organising powers of the citizens would reach. In other words, the state's constitutional framework guaranteed certain basic freedoms and they needed to be effectively and progressively realised. It is due to this implicit understanding that the PUCL never emphasised mass mobilisation as much as it did recourse to available legal means.³

The state-civil society complementarity was to be pursued and further achieved around two conjoined programmes of first, (re) establishing the autonomy and independence of institutions of both the state and civil society, and second, entrenching and strengthening the project of citizenship by effectively realising citizens' civil, political and social rights.

³ See Balagopal (1987). He argues that even during this period: 'Extensive use was made of the Preventive Detention Act, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and the Defence of India Rules; over wide areas the army was employed and the promulgation of "Disturbed Areas" was effected. But all these were mainly against the tribal nationalities of the North East and the communist-led peasants and workers in the rest of the country. This did not spoil the state's reputation for constitutionality very much' (1987: 41).

The various initiatives taken by the PUCL to restore the autonomy of institutions such as the judiciary by protesting against the curtailment of the jurisdiction of the courts, were considered the precondition for the presence of a rule of law necessary to curtail the arbitrary use of power and democratic transgressions. No meaningful equality before law could be presumed without the necessary neutrality, accountability and openness of the intermediary institutions. In turn, however, it needs to be recognised that the PUCL believed that ‘institutional autonomy of the judiciary draws sustenance from the axiomatic assumption that the state alone can guarantee essential freedoms to the individual’ (Gupta 2004: 232). Similarly, it emphasised the autonomy of civil societal institutions such as the media and educational institutions, by protesting against the censorship of the press to make way for informed political participation that could put an accountable and responsive state in place. It was precisely for this reason that the PUCL had, fairly early, stressed the importance of electoral reforms as the right to vote was an extremely potent tool with which to fight discrimination, specially for the most vulnerable and marginalised social groups. However, in a highly segmented society like India, mere institutional autonomy was thought to be insufficient for either guaranteeing social equality or even augmenting public welfare. Institutions could be greatly efficient and autonomous; however, precisely for this reason, they might deny entry to disadvantaged groups. Thus, the PUCL, along with emphasising the autonomy of institutions, also struggled to recover a ‘rights based civil society’, where all citizens could have access to fundamental rights.

The PUCL mobilised itself not only against draconian provisions such as the preventive detention law, in favour of safeguards against arbitrary recourse to emergency provisions or for a new Prison Act, but also for positive social rights (such as the right to education) so that all individuals and social groups, as citizens, could achieve equality of status. Recognising all individuals, irrespective of their caste, class, gender and regional identities as citizens would initially give them legal equality, eventually pull them out of their specific disadvantages and duly accommodate them as part of the developmental goals of the state. Thus, in the first phase of the HRM, the PUCL believed that ‘civil society as an ethic of freedom manifests itself in the modern democratic constitutional state by creating citizens and by upholding institutional autonomy’ (ibid.).

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III

State versus civil society

The nature of the state under Mrs Gandhi underwent a dramatic transformation with the authoritarian impulses of Nehru's statist model of nation building becoming more pronounced. Notwithstanding the welfare orientation under Nehru, the state was also developed as a highly centralised instrument to negotiate the different conflicts in civil society. Commenting on this process, Bhikhu Parekh (1995: 44) observes that:

The state was the only conduit through which various parts of the society related to one another and was a party to all disputes and conflicts. It therefore became the sole centre of all political ambitions and energies and an arena of powerful ideological passions.

It was this inherent trend of centralisation that Mrs Gandhi intended to strengthen when she initiated a process of 'deinstitutionalisation' by undermining intra-party elections; offering dubious concepts such as 'committed bureaucracy' and 'committed judiciary'; encouraging a top-down approach in order to hand pick chief ministers in various states; and misusing Articles 356 and 352. More importantly, Mrs Gandhi was using the idea of welfarism, the foundation of the state-civil society complementarity, to further authoritarian and centralising tendencies. Centralised planning, the use of modern technology and the role of 'experts' and technocrats became integral to governance. These methods, in the name of maintaining efficiency, achieving 'developmental' goals and preserving the 'unity and integrity' of the nation, increasingly created a wedge between politics or popular participation and the government.⁴ This process was evident in the way a welfarist '20 point programme' was announced during the Emergency. Welfarism was the new mode of enhancing state control and disengaging the masses from popular participation in the decision making process. Further, this was the period when there was a fall in industrial growth. There were incidences of severe drought and a sharp rise in food prices. The social base of the state shifted to a newly emerging neo-rich or lumpen class, born largely out

⁴ For a detailed account of this process, see Chatterjee (1994); also see Kothari (1988).

of the leakages of the first phase of development. This class included contractors, real estate dealers, liquor traders, rentiers, gamblers, speculators, cinema producers and actors (Haragopal and Balagopal 1998: 360; Sethi 1975: 25). The rise of the new classes was accompanied by a coercive state which became increasingly evident in the use of force and rampant manipulation of legal procedures. For instance:

those set free from preventive detention were brought back to prison—often arrested outside the court premises or at the doorstep of the prisons, on specific charges. A favourite device of some of the state governments was the implication of individuals in a number of interlocking cases. There was horizontal as well as vertical interlocking (Ram 1986: 93).

In this period, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was used in Assam; the National Security Act was put on the statute books and then amended twice to make it even more draconian and a Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act was enacted and employed widely all the way from Punjab to Andhra Pradesh.⁵

This, broadly, was the social and political context for the shift in the HRM from its earlier state-civil society complementarity framework to its second phase—the democratic rights phase—during the 1980s, marked by a new *state versus civil society* framework. The split in the PUCL and the formation of the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) in Delhi signalled the beginning of this phase:

A section of activists felt that the usage of the terms ‘civil liberties’ by the PUCL leaders restricted itself to (these) codified safeguards. The more radical activists used the category ‘democratic rights’ as a critique to the term ‘civil liberties’. It implied the freedom to claim even non-codified rights, or, in other words, rights which citizens were not endowed with under the existent legal system (Dutta 1998: 283).

⁵ See Balagopal (1987: 42). Balagopal notes that there were a host of lesser enactments like the Postal Bill and the amendment to the Commissions of Enquiry Act which also surfaced during this period. See Sumanta Banerjee (1987), also Kothari and Sethi (1991).

This was the phase when the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) was revived in West Bengal which later split with the formation of the Association for the Establishment of Democratic Rights (AEDR) on the issue that there are no democratic rights to 'protect' in India. This radical perspective also marked the revival of the Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR) and the Association for Democratic Rights (AFDR) in Punjab, the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR) in Mumbai and the formation of the Manab Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti (MASS) in Assam. In Andhra Pradesh, the Andhra Pradesh Civil and Democratic Rights Association (APCDR) was the first organisation to come into existence. It later split into the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) and the OPDR, broadly representing two different factions of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (ML)], but both working within the new 'democratic rights' framework. Most of these organisations began working in close proximity with different radical-militant struggles in their states such as the armed Naxalite movement and the militant nationality struggles.

In its struggle for democratic rights, the APCLC initially focused on organising fact finding committees on 'encounter deaths' and lock-up deaths, providing legal assistance to the arrested activists of various Marxist-Leninist parties and protesting for the right to organise public meetings, processions and *dharnas* on behalf of the various mass organisations of the Naxalite groups. In its second state-level convention, held in Warangal on 4 May 1980, it adopted its manifesto and declared that its central concerns were the protection of people's right to struggle and protest, opposing the atrocities of feudal landlords, capitalists and the state machinery, condemning police excesses and also fighting for the abolition of capital punishment (APCLC n.d.: 23). This was the activist phase of the HRM, which went beyond looking for mere legal remedies. Its members included leading lawyers, academics, artists, poets, journalists and students, apart from several full-time activists. Paradoxically, in spite of the shift to an activist phase, human rights organisations, contrary to building a vibrant, independent and separate movement, were more concerned with projecting themselves as a 'platform' or a 'forum' to 'shield' the radical political movements and struggle on their behalf to protect their 'right to protest' and extend legal and constitutional safeguards to the activists and leaders of these movements. The HRM was more than willing to play second fiddle to the militant democratic, or the Marxist-Leninist

movements and was convinced of the urgent need to use militant ‘transformative violence’ or ‘counter-violence’ against the state in order to bring about a grand structural transformation. The HRM felt that in building a militant civil society it had a very limited, although significant, role to play by maintaining proximity with the radical militant organisations and their struggles. The proceedings of the APDR, after self-introspection, reached the conclusion that the ‘civil liberties organization (was) mainly characterised by acting as a *shield* of the democratic struggles carried on by the common people. In a sense, this role though *limited* (was) very important’ (APDR 1991: 6, emphasis mine). The role was also ‘secondary’ in terms of its capacity to mobilise people numerically, as ‘the movement (was) limited to few individuals and limited sections of people’ (ibid.).

However, as the 1980s was also a phase which saw the emergence of various other social movements—women’s, Dalit, regional, minority and environmental movements—apart from the Naxalite and nationality struggles, human rights organisations began to gradually extend their scope to protect the rights of the activists of these movements as well as their political concerns. Various types of discriminations came to articulate themselves in the democratic rights language. The PUCL and the PUDR, in 1984, investigated and published a booklet titled ‘Who Are The Guilty’ on the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. It directly named some of the culprits who belonged to the ruling Congress Party. Some felt that with its publication, ‘groups fighting for civil liberties and democratic rights acquired a national legitimacy’ (Desai 1991). It was true that no other organisation had dared to openly record and reveal the names of those involved in massacres, despite it being public knowledge. In Andhra Pradesh, the turning point came with the gruesome Karamchedu massacre of Dalits in July 1985. The APCLC investigated, again revealed the names of some upper-caste landlords who had been involved and, working in tandem with Dalit organisations, kept the issue politically alive till some of the culprits were physically eliminated by armed squads of the then Peoples War Group.⁶ Thereafter, the APCLC began to enlarge its scope and investigate atrocities against women such as dowry deaths and domestic violence,

⁶ In October 2004, after their merger with the Maoist Communist Centre of Bihar, the People’s War Group (PWG) was renamed the Communist Party of India (Maoist), prior to the peace talks with the government of Andhra Pradesh.

as well as famine and hunger deaths in various districts and issues related to environmental pollution. However, what is pertinent in this expansion of the HRM into various other social and political issues is the fact that it approached these issues strictly through the state versus civil society prism, an approach born out of the HRM's proximity to Marxist-Leninist groups. For instance, it was the role of the ruling Congress Party that was stressed by the PUCL and the PUDR in its report 'Who Are the Guilty', completely undermining any dialogue on the growing communalism within civil society. It was the caste (in this case Kamma) nexus, which actively operated in various state institutions (the assembly, judiciary and the police), that was the focus of APCLC's investigation. This is not to say that these issues, or for that matter the perspectives, were unimportant; however, the HRM was not in any immediate sense concerned with highlighting the existence and replication of power relations and forms of discrimination at the civil societal level such as growing communalism and rigid caste hierarchies. It did not consider the possibility that all forms of human rights violations need not necessarily have emerged directly from the state, although the state might have actively encouraged them.

This issue of human rights violation at the civil societal level became starkly, and rather poignantly, evident with the accidental deaths of innocents or common people in the course of military operations carried out by the Naxalites against the police.⁷ In response to such incidents, human rights organisations took recourse to the argument that 'a civil rights organisation was concerned only with state violence' and the concern for 'private violence does not fall under its purview'—a stand initially taken in an open letter written by leaders of the APCLC to the chief minister in July 1985 and thereafter repeated *ad nauseam* whenever questioned about their concern and responsibility vis-à-vis the victims of 'private violence'. Some of the leading activist-intellectual representatives of the democratic rights phase, defending the actively 'biased' position, argued that:

The reason is very simple. Whereas, in a law-based state like India, there exists an elaborate code, an entire ensemble of laws, procedures,

⁷ Common people also lost their lives sometimes, or rather most of the time, when they were deliberately used as 'shields' by the police. For instance, the police continue to opt to travel in public transport that common people use rather than their official vehicles when they visit remote areas as part of their combing operations.

institutions and enforcement agencies to deal with private violence or lawlessness, there is nothing comparable, no genuine checks or controls, to take care of peaceful or violent lawlessness of the state, which is potentially, and often in actual practice, the most powerful violator of democratic rights in society (Singh 1993: 82).

However, this position stood in contrast to the interventions that the APCLC, on more than one occasion, made to mitigate 'private violence' that erupted in the inter-group rivalry and killings between the various factions of the revolutionary movement. These interventions were more a result of the APCLC's proximity with the revolutionary parties rather than any sustained self-reflection on the issue. Despite growing criticism from various quarters of civil society, as well as the deliberate and manipulative use made of this hiatus on the part of the HRM by the state,⁸ the democratic rights organisations refused to critically reflect on their state versus civil society framework.

This initial reluctance could be understood in the immediate context of a repressive state which, to counter the growth and expansion of the HRM, was by then arresting, or physically attacking and kidnapping, leading civil rights activists all over the country. To cite a few instances, in Assam, Parag Das, who had political and organisational proximity with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), was with MASS and was a popular editor of a leading Assamese daily, was shot dead by the SULFA ('Surrendered ULFA') with the active connivance of the state police. In Andhra Pradesh, Gopi Rajanna, Narra Prabhakar Reddy and, more recently, Purshottam (all office bearers of the APCLC), were brutally killed by the police; K. Balagopal was attacked, assaulted with knuckle-dusters and kidnapped by an outfit calling itself Prajabandhu (August 1989), and V.M. Tarkunde (the then president of the PUCL) and K.G. Kannabiran (the long-term president of the APCLC) were assaulted at a public meeting in Madurai. A subsequent president of APCLC, Laxman, was also kidnapped in November 2003 by surrendered Naxalites operating as private mercenaries, again with the active involvement of state police (APCLC 1985: 77). Such increasing physical attacks only reinforced the human rights organisations' understanding of the state as the primary, and perhaps

⁸ State officials, bureaucrats and the police often argued that this entailed 'double standards', and also exposed the proximity HRM had with 'outlawed' organisations.

the sole, violator of human rights and thereby vindicated their state versus civil society framework. These attacks, coupled with the sacrifice and resolution of the activists, provided them with a ready 'moral' reasoning of the correctness of their politics. Thus, the HRM was not prepared to reflect on the 'conceits of the civil society' or let go of their singular focus on the state, which only meant weakening civil society and the movements it constituted, and strengthening the state. The implicit fear was that by equating and conflating the various types of violations (whether carried out by revolutionary movements or the state), the state would be let off the hook. Interestingly, while in the first phase of the HRM, it did not want to absolve the state by overlooking its constitutional responsibilities to its citizens, in the second, it did not miss any opportunity to dismantle and delegitimise the state.

Thus, the 1980s marked a rupture in the HRM with efforts to construct civil society as a pure 'realm of freedom' that stood squarely outside the state and consisted of various militant and radical social movements. They consciously worked, as much as possible, outside formal institutions such as courts, in an attempt to delegitimise and minimise the arena of state control. Civil society now signified political action, rather than a mere site for forming public opinion.⁹ Organisations such as the PUDR and the APCLC strongly believed that what brought the various social movements in civil society together was:

their shared perception that the state is the repository of coercive force which is frequently directed against the citizens. The fact that the state is a potential and actual transgressor of individual liberty and that its might must be collectively challenged gives coherence to the otherwise diverse units of civil society (Mahajan 2004: 181).

⁹ Within the liberal tradition, civil society was envisaged as a 'space where citizens could meet in order to socialize with their fellow-citizens, to exchange ideas and discuss issues of common concern, to form political opinion. *It was not a sphere where those opinions translated into political action and decision-making*' (Frevert 2005: 63, emphasis mine). Such a distinction between thought and action emanates from the classical liberal formulation of J.S. Mill, granting 'absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological' (Levi 1963: 138), coupled with elaborate restrictions on the 'freedom to act'. The earlier phase of HRM was close to this kind of liberal articulation and therefore left the action to the state, which combines legislative and administrative powers.

They, therefore, worked relentlessly to expose the state on the one hand, and protect the coherence of civil society on the other. Everything else came later.

The rigid *state versus civil society* framework, however, became increasingly untenable with the beginning of the 1990s. The context this time around was provided by the simultaneous unfolding of multiple contradictions manifested in the growing conflicts *within* and *between* various social movements. The HRM was, in a sense, caught unawares and the radical articulations by the Dalit, women's and regional movements, not only against the state but also vis-à-vis each other, escaped its rigid binaries and neat totalities. An important starting point for this can be traced to the Koyyur kidnapping on 30 January 1993 in Andhra Pradesh, when a tribal MLA was kidnapped from Vishakapatnam district by the PWG. Various Dalit organisations, the most prominent among them being the Dalit Maha Sabha, raised serious objections to Dalit leaders (who in any case were few and far between) who were weak and vulnerable being picked up as 'soft' targets and used as hostages in exchange for fulfilling of demands with which they had nothing to do. They raised pertinent ideological and political questions on what they referred to as 'caste-blind politics' of the far-left groups.¹⁰ The state, too, took its own time to react, allowing the new growing conflicts to brew. What was brought out was the fact that mere anti-state activity neither exhausted nor addressed the concerns of the other social struggles; neither did it provide for unifying them unproblematically in a 'coherent civil society'.

The APCLC intervened to resolve the 'crisis' and demanded the release of the kidnapped. Refuting their earlier position on 'private violence', perhaps for the first time, the then president of the APCLC wrote:

The practice of taking as hostages persons unconnected with the specific issue between the government and the PWG is a practice we in APCLC never approved of. We have been as human rights activists against this type of political practice. Whether the police hold people in illegal custody or the Naxalites kidnap and take as hostages persons unconnected with the specific issues involved our stand has been the same (Kannabiran 1993: 495).¹¹

¹⁰ For a detailed debate between the Dalit and Marxist-Leninist groups in Andhra Pradesh and their changing perception of each other, see Gudavarthy (2005).

¹¹ See also Haragopal (1993).

The break from the rigid state versus civil society framework was further strengthened with new questions:

For human rights activists, Koyyuru (and earlier Gurthedu) (raised issues regarding the concepts of human rights itself, the advisability of expanding the concept and thereby enlarging the field of operation of human rights work. What should be its relations with radical and democratic movements? Has it any transforming role while operating the institutions available within a democratic set up? Should it merely confine itself to maintaining a crime audit of the state? All such and related questions need to be debated (Kannabiran 1993: 498).

This trend of problematising power dynamics and human rights violations at the civil societal level was expressed and took centre-stage through the series of questions that the young activists of the APCLC raised in their state and district-level meetings. During the Kurnool convention in 1993, they began by raising a sensitive issue—pointing out that a large number of those killed by the Naxalites as ‘informers’ were from the SC, ST and OBC communities and who, due to the absence of any form of social networking, failed to return to the so-called ‘mainstream’ life, and often succumbed to police pressure and passed on (sometimes very crucial) information after surrendering. Similarly, accusations of ‘silent’ discrimination and violence against women were levelled against male members active in the various social movements which could not be ignored as either a ‘personal’ or a ‘private’ matter. Discussion papers carrying the old perspective—that is, reinforcing the state versus civil society framework while arguing that there cannot be an independent ‘human rights perspective’ that was different and autonomous from and, more importantly, critical of the ‘revolutionary perspective’—and the new perspective which brought into relief a more critical approach to civil societal violations, were printed and circulated among the members, and the debate continued at all district-level meetings for over a couple of years. A national convention on ‘Democratic Movements and Human Rights Perspectives’ was organised in Hyderabad in June 1996, with the aim of making the debate public, as well as gathering the views of other national-level democratic rights organisations. Later, during the Guntur convention of the APCLC towards the end of 1997, they voted on the two contending

perspectives, as a result of which APCLC split and a new organisation called the Human Rights Forum (HRF) was formed.

IV

Civil society versus political society

The formation of the HRF marked the beginning of the third phase of the HRM—the human rights phase—which now worked within a new *civil society versus political society* framework.¹² The immediate focus of the new framework in identifying and constructing the new political society was to stress the importance of locating and condemning human rights violations at the civil societal level including those committed by radical social movements, thereby politicising a larger array of social issues. The new approach also highlighted the inadequacy of maintaining or striving for the unity of various social struggles around an anti-state activity without recognising the independent sites and methods of discrimination, the possible areas of mutual conflicts between them and thereby the need for autonomous movements along different axes of discrimination. The HRF, in its inaugural pamphlet, explained its differences with the ‘democratic rights perspective’ as against the new ‘human rights perspective’, which had foregrounded the adverse impact of human rights violations at the civil societal level. The pamphlet stated, ‘We believe that unjust and unfair use of violence even by a popular movement must be openly condemned, not because it is violence but because it is unjust’ (Human Rights Forum 2000: 4). It further made a plea for treating all discrimination independently and at par, and argued that:

The political structure of the state and the social-economic structures of caste, class and gender have received some recognition as oppressive structures, but are yet to assume *equal importance*, in the eyes of the

¹² The concept of political society used here does not refer strictly to the way it has been recently conceptualised by Partha Chatterjee and instead refers to a broader process of politicising a larger array of social issues and practices. However, it cannot be denied that there are overlaps in terms of a critique of hegemonic practices in civil society, a mapping of civil society as a site of power relations and a recognition of the need to politically negotiate with the choices, radical or otherwise, of subalterns. For Partha Chatterjee’s idea of political society, see Chatterjee (2004).

rights movement. The state–class framework continues to dominate for no cogent reason. But both caste and gender are major sources of not only violent suppression but also routine and insidious denial of rights. There is no scale on which their effect can be adjudged less severe than that of state and/or class (HRF 2000: 1)

Finally, stressing the inadequacy (and perhaps the impossibility) of a solidarity based around just anti-state activity, it further argued:

The state–class framework that unconsciously guides our thinking of rights has come from militant-leftist movements and the problems of suppression they have faced from the state and the exploiting classes. But if we are ready to learn equally from the dalit movement and the women’s movement and the politics of various minorities, religious, ethnic or linguistic groups then these movements have mostly sought to empower themselves by making use of and enlarging the democratic political space and the political and civil rights available in the present state and the political system (ibid.: 2).

At almost the same time, an independent organisation known as the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) came into existence. Its vision constituted a ‘search for a democratic space’, initially between the state and the radical political movements, but also between the various conflicting interests within civil society. Interestingly, it drew its members largely from the various civil rights organisations in Andhra Pradesh which had professed to be handicapped at the stalemate that had ensued between a repressive state and the civil rights organisations working within a rigid state versus civil society framework. In the foreword to the first report the committee published, it made it a point to proclaim that:

The group which came to be known as the Committee of Concerned Citizens (*Puara Spandana Vedika*) was not formed at the instance of any authority or organisation. It emerged on its own, open to reflect the voice of large democratic sections of the society which is tired at being reduced to a mute spectator in the game with peoples lives played by the state and the revolutionary parties (Committee of Concerned Citizens 1998: 1).

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Unlike the previous phase, in this one the HRM began by looking for a space between the state and revolution. It is from this independent vantage point that it wished to raise a series of questions at the behest of a political society. Perhaps the single most important concern for the CCC was how to privilege and preserve the choice of political participation for the subaltern masses and prevent spiralling violence between the government and Naxalite groups, leading to an escalating suffering of the most vulnerable. This concern led the CCC to raise pertinent points regarding the possible ways of understanding the relation between the 'people' and the (Marxist-Leninist) 'party'. Can the Naxalite groups claim that all their actions were actions *by* the people? Can all actions (read excesses) of the party be condoned because they were carried out in the 'larger' interests of the people? In what ways is the party responsible, and what ought to be their response to the growing suffering of the people under conditions of 'circular violence'? Similarly, they also stressed the need to engage with the available 'democratic' institutions of the state and civil society, for instance by recognising the opportunities the 73rd Amendment provided for Dalits and women in local governance institutions and therefore the need for periodic elections without violence. It is also in this context that the CCC re-emphasised the need to protect principles such as the 'rule of law', instead of delegitimising them as either bourgeois principles or a mere 'juridical illusion' (Meszaros 1985: 196–211). Finally, the CCC unequivocally condemned the brutality of the Naxalite groups when dealing with the people 'as no less abominable than the third degree methods used in police camps' (CCC 1998). Such violence not only further brutalises society, but also reduces the space for the fearless expression of opinion and political action for the masses at large, thereby robbing people of the experience necessary to take control of their lives, crucial for both existing and post-revolutionary societies.¹³ The revolutionary parties, on the other hand, also lay claim to representing the concerns of a political society by engaging with the conflicts in civil society as well as the issue of free political participation by the people themselves. They argued

¹³ The growing significance of the shift in HRM could also be felt in the response of PWG to these observations of CCC. In their reply, PWG observed, 'though there are some shortcomings in the report of the concerned citizens, we feel that the Committee of Concerned Citizens has exhibited an essentially *democratic approach*' (Committee of Concerned Citizens 1998: 18).

that the revolutionary parties did recognise the conflicts in civil society and, therefore:

It is exactly here that the masses should be guided by the revolutionary leadership to understand the contradictions among the people and the united front that they have to forge in order to make the revolution successful. When they understand these two things then the excesses in people's courts, the occupation of land of even some middle class peasantry on some occasions and other wrong ways of dealing with contradictions among the people will get automatically solved (Ravi 1993: 1471).

Similarly, the revolutionary process is engaged with encouraging mass participation. However, the human rights groups need to realise that in the course of such a process, there are bound to be mistakes and excesses, and it is undialectical to imagine the process to be otherwise. It is therefore important to understand that:

When the leadership itself deals with the village-level contradictions it is likely to reduce the excesses, but when the initiative is left to the masses then such anarchy is bound to be there in an anti-feudal struggle, but their experience will leave in them a higher level of consciousness. The first option is absolutely impractical and even if it is practical, which is preferable ... which is the correct mass line? Which is centralizing the power? Which will guarantee the future egalitarian society? The initiative of the masses or the superimposed directions from the leadership? (ibid.).

It is against these claims and counter-claims to political society that the CCC initiated the process for peace talks between the state and the revolutionary parties. The talks between 15–18 October 2004 centred around the basic premise that both the state and the revolutionary movements should strive to reduce the perpetual fear and uncertainty that the common people were labouring under and that it is their choice and voice that needs to be prioritised over everything else.¹⁴

¹⁴ For a detailed account of the recent peace talks between the government of Andhra Pradesh and the Communist Party of India (Maoist) see Committee of Concerned Citizens (2006).

The third phase of the HRM was an attempt to expand its scope by locating the power relations and the consequent human rights violations in civil society and gradually moving towards a political society that engaged with the complex micro-processes of social transformation.¹⁵ Therefore, political society had a democratising effect in terms of politically negotiating the different social issues that had been hitherto neglected by the rights movement, as also the differences and conflicts between the various movements. The HRM, however, was struck with a difficult question: ‘what prevents political society from splitting into warring factions or degenerating into a congeries of inward-looking particularistic “interests”’? In other words, ‘is there a viable distinction between the multiple “special interests” of the political society and the common “public interest”’? If yes, how, and by whom, will this public interest be safeguarded around certain “common principles”’?¹⁶ The HRM quickly grasped the difficulty of foregrounding the new broadened ‘human rights perspective’ solely around the issue of preserving one’s interests and identity.¹⁷ It had to relocate itself in making an effort, in whichever way possible, to ‘bring the dialectic of self-transformation and self-reflection to the very heart of identity formation itself’ (Giri 2005: 220). It is this issue of negotiating with the conflicting implications of the ‘human rights perspective’ of pursuing interest-based politics and radical politicisation that located the HRM in a liminal space, which it wished to overcome to avoid stagnation.

V

The contemporary moment: Beyond the political?

The contradictory implications of a political society marked by empowerment through the protection and politicisation of interests on the one hand, and a process of fragmentation of political struggles with their

¹⁵ For an elaborate argument on how, after the collapse of the East European socialist regimes, western political theory has constructed the arena of civil society as an alternative political space which is devoid of any conflictual power relations, see Chandhoke (2001, 2003).

¹⁶ For a series of similar questions being discussed, see Foley and Edwards (1996).

¹⁷ It is this issue of the inadequacy in explorations of the limitations of interest-based politics that we focused on in our critique of Partha Chatterjee’s notion of ‘political society’; see Gudavarthy and Vijay (2007). It is also for this reason that I place emphasis on differentiating my use of political society in this article.

self-arrogating discourses on the other is sought to be overcome in the contemporary moment of the HRM by, ironically, moving beyond the domain of the political that constituted the core character of political society. The HRM seems to be reformulating its civil society versus political society framework through the underpinning of a new ethical dimension.¹⁸ As a significant departure, it seems to be hinting at recasting the ‘human rights perspective’ by arguing that ‘primarily rights are ethical norms and any attempt to treat them as primarily or explicitly political can only lead to sectarian divisions and stagnation in the human rights movement’.¹⁹ In such a framework, the HRM itself is not a political movement. Instead, the ‘political movement and human rights movement as such exist in two planes: the planes of interests and values’ (Balagopal forthcoming). This relocation of the HRM in an ethical domain is being sought in order to rethink the way social transformation has occurred in history during struggles of the oppressed, where ‘what they have fought is not oppression *as such* but the oppression of the Other that has hurt their interests’.²⁰ The struggle against oppression *as such* happens, or is possible, only in the realm of ethics or morals, and:

¹⁸ The following position is being articulated primarily by Dr K. Balagopal (a leading human rights activist and theoretician and office bearer of the HRF), with a few members and activists of the HRM and other social movements gravitating towards a position that reflects the possibility of a new political society versus an ethical society framework. However, it is yet to take a definitive institutional form, though again there are hints that the HRM is being implicitly driven by this new shift. I, therefore, prefer to refer to this new framework as a moment, rather than a definitive phase, of the HRM.

¹⁹ Balagopal (forthcoming). For a brief summary of the contents of this forthcoming book, see Gudavarthy and Vijay (2004). Upendra Baxi also seems to agree with the essential moral underpinnings of HRM, and argues that: ‘The social theory of human rights, of necessity, has to find bases for ethical judgment concerning “good” and “bad” social movements It does seek to provide a “predetermined directionality” in human social development by articulating an ethic of power, whether in state, civil society, or the market’ (Baxi 2002: 120–21). It is, however, not clear as to how he places this ‘ethical judgment’ vis-à-vis the political moment in social movements in general, and the HRM in particular. He seems to agree with the idea that there is some essential distinction between the way the HRM relates to the idea of (political) ‘power’ and the way other social movements do, and it is therefore ‘then understandable that most contemporary social theory and history of new social movements does not focus on human rights movements as social movements’ (ibid.: 121).

²⁰ Balagopal (1995: 59). Similar ideas of emancipation going beyond the achievement of immediate interests can be located in a large array of writers with different ideological

this rebuilding has wrongly been seen as a direct continuation of the struggle against injustice. This notion that the force that is necessary to destroy unjust social structures will by itself lead to the reconstruction of society on a just basis ... has been sufficiently proved an illusion by the happenings of this century (Balagopal 1995: 60).

The struggles in the 'material' or political realm do not have a direct impact or a necessary continuity with 'moral evolution'.²¹ Thus, while the HRM is the embodiment of the human struggle to restore (universal) ethics/values, political movements protect the (particularistic) interests of various social groups. The HRM, therefore, has the difficult task of standing at a distance while working in tandem with political movements. It needs to retain its autonomy in order to generate a discourse of ethical praxis, and maintain proximity in order to effectively cut across all political struggles.

This attempt to de-link the political and the moral and locate the HRM *exclusively* within an abstract ethical domain comes as a response to the subterranean divide between the moral and political dimension, in the discourses of various political movements including the Dalit and

frameworks. For instance, Paulo Friere, the famous Latin American philosopher and educationist, argues that in order for radical social struggles 'to have meaning, the oppressed must not in seeking to regain their humanity become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both ... this then is the great historical and humanist task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well' (1972: 31).

Gandhi argued that the oppressed need to hate oppression, such as the practice of untouchability, and not the oppressor, and therefore there is no place for violence, and there is a need to incorporate into our struggles the necessary efforts for the 'change of heart' of the oppressor. See Iyer (1978).

²¹ This idea of a separation between the 'material' and the 'moral', which has emerged in the context of the present-day HRM locating itself vis-à-vis the various radical struggles, seems strangely to have parallels with the way the anti-colonial national movement perceived itself vis-à-vis the colonial rulers. Partha Chatterjee observes: 'Anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society *well before it begins its political battle* with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual' (1993: 6; emphasis mine). It was this separation that was later superimposed on the 'political' struggle against colonialism. For a critique of such a separation and its dualistic implications (which is perhaps relevant in the context of the present-day HRM too, and the new direction, marked by its ethical dimension, that it seems to be taking) in a graded society like India, see Aloysius (1998).

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the Naxalite movements.²² Ironically, in responding to the already existing moral essentialism of the political movements, the HRM seems to slip into an obverse moralism of its own by condemning political movements to a delimited struggle for interests and arrogating to itself the larger task of entrenching abstract ethics.²³ The contemporary response of the HRM could be traced to some of the variants of moral essentialism that it had to face in its interaction with the various political movements. The more existentialist reason for such a shift can be traced to the fact that socially (caste, class and gender-wise), most activists who seem to be gravitating towards such arguments for a bifurcation between the political and the ethical belong to the more 'privileged' upper echelons. They often face a serious sense of isolation, as political movements around them are demanding exclusive organic linkages with those who wish to lead them, or even be part of their struggles.²⁴ This self-valorisation (or moralisation) of identities is perceived by the HRM as a shift on the part of political movements into an insular mode which is fraught with pragmatic responses *to* and *within* the emerging political dynamic, and, most importantly, bereft of a moral dimension. The HRM, therefore, now wishes to superimpose and externally inject its own variant of an abstract ethical

²² In fact, constructing the political society, as opposed to civil society, was an attempt at critiquing moralisation, which is, for instance, evident in the self-valorisation of each movement or, for that matter, the valorisation of the arena of civil society as against the state. HRM used the concept of political society to critique abstract moralising as against contextualising the choices available to subalterns. However, here, having initiated the process, there seems to be an apparent retreat, only to reintroduce the moral-political divide.

²³ This divide, therefore, lets political movements off the hook by reconciling their struggles with the realm of interests. Some scholars have suggested in response to this formulation that what is called for, instead of the divide between the moral and political dimensions, is 'transforming the moral self into the political self and moral questions into political ones. This certainly does not call for super-imposing an arrogant moral discourse on the politically disunited people's movements' (Patnaik 1995: 1202). Also see Gudavarthy (1996).

²⁴ For instance, the Dalit Maha Sabha makes it a point to emphasise that 'only dalits' shall occupy the dais in all their meetings, and that no upper-caste activist, however sympathetic and radical she/he might be, will be allowed to do so. This process of 'othering' makes all others permanent 'outsiders' to the movement. This indeed is a variant of moral essentialism in the Dalit movement. However, the question as to why political movements take this route to find a space for themselves in the existing political domain needs to be historicised, and is predominantly a political question. For a more detailed account, see Gudavarthy (2005).

dimension which will open the way for a democratic dialogue and space for all those not organically linked to these movements.

The nature of the social base of the HRM was always suspect. The militant left movement always characterised it as 'petty bourgeoisie' in a derogatory sense, and often referred to it mockingly as the 'middle class wing of revolution'. Many activists in the HRM themselves shared this perception. This anecdote sharply highlights the ambiguity:

At a discussion in Delhi (under the auspices of the PUCL) the problem of 'legitimacy' of human rights activism, astonishingly surfaced and there was even some talk of the need for human rights communities to 'woo the middle classes' back to the value /mission ... (n)ot long ago many leading human rights communities critiqued, rightly (*prescinding the question of moral opportunism in practice of politics*) the middle class support to the anti-Mandal agitation (Baxi 1998: 349).

In another context, a long-term vice-president of the APCLC and now member of the CCC argues, 'In fact, the middle class becomes spineless and loses the nerve against a repressive state. Some liberal activists shift their stand very fast. They not only compromise but also gradually degenerate into a self-seeking and self-aggrandizing class of individuals' (Haragopal and Balagopal 1998: 367). This perceived inherent moral weakness never allowed the HRM to articulate itself as an independent and credible political movement, apart from the other related reasons stated earlier.²⁵ The HRM, therefore, now feels the need to pose issues in explicit moral/ethical terms, both as a response and as a means to overcome this perceived handicap. This compulsive tension within the HRM will persist as long as it is not prepared to carry out an independent (as it continues to share this perception with militant left groups) and a more positive

²⁵ Further, whenever individuals within HRM raised questions that were uncomfortable for radical left struggles, they juxtaposed the sacrifice of the militant underground activists against the comfortable 'middle class lives' of human rights activists. The level of sacrifice thereby settled the authenticity and correctness of their political positions. Often, in private, human rights activists expressed discontent over what they referred to as a silent 'moral blackmail', while those activists in HRM close to the radical left valorised such arguments. There is a different kind of moralisation operating here, as compared to the previous point. There is a (de)moralisation of the middle class which stands accused of a permanent lack of morality.

reading of the middle class and its contribution to various ‘mass’ movements. Raymond Williams critiquing the conventional position of radical left groups on the role of the middle class argues:

The significance of predominantly middle-class leadership or membership of the new movements and campaigns is not to be found in some reductive analysis of the determined agencies of change. It is, first, in the fact of some available social distance, an area for affordable dissent. It is, second, in the fact that many of the most important elements of the new movements and campaigns are radically dependent on access to independent information, typically though not exclusively through higher education and that some of the most decisive facts cannot be generated from immediate experience but only from conscious analysis (1983: 254–55).

The HRM is definitely a movement that is dependent on ‘available social distance’ and involved in constructing a refracted ‘political culture’, which at times (though not always) is difficult to ‘generate from immediate experience’.²⁶

Finally, a moral/ethical resolution to avoid ‘stagnation’ in the HRM is sought due to the moral *ad hocism* within both Marxist theory and radical left movements, as well as the latter’s refusal to develop consistent political principles around the means-ends issue. Steven Lukes, in his interesting study on ‘Marxism and Morality’, argues that:

On the one hand Marxism has treated morality as ideological, historically relative, shaped by social and class determinants and so on,

²⁶ ‘Thus, at its core CRM (the Civil Rights Movement) is a movement for a specific kind of “political culture”—a culture that socializes a society with democratic temperament. A belief in the possibility of institutionalization and protection of norms and practices that govern the state-society relationship is central to the efforts of the CRM This is both the strength and weakness of the movement It is (also) a weakness in the sense that it imposes severe constraints on the mobilization potential of the CRM. Vast masses, who have to struggle for their basic daily-bread, cannot be mobilized into the fold of the CRM. Even if the CRM could mobilize the masses against a background of severe repression, it would be more an ad hoc type of mobilization Thus owing to its objective—generating democratic culture—the CRM, at least the core of it, is, bound to be, oriented towards the middle classes’ (Kakarala 1993: 415–16).

purporting itself to reject any moral or moralizing discourse ... on the other hand Marx's and Marxist writings abound in moral judgments, implicit and explicit (1985: 4).

This unexplored continuum between ethics and politics re-emerges as moral *ad hocism* mostly on the basis of 'consequentialist reasoning'. For instance, Herbert Marcuse argues for limitations on revolutionary violence by establishing 'general norms', and E.P. Thompson recommends humanist attitudes 'whenever and to the degree that contingencies allow', so that they do not negate the very end for which the revolution is a means.²⁷ Beyond such contingent moral advocacy, Marxist theoreticians were hesitant to suggest the means of converting moral principles into political norms, and vice-versa. For instance, radical left movements never conceptualised exactly what constituted 'revolutionary violence'. Some attempts on the part of the HRM to engage with issues of permissible or impermissible 'strategies' and 'tactics' were unsuccessful. It is this loss of such historical moments in concretising values that re-emerges as the eternal wait for the moment of pure morality (very like the 'last instance' in Althusser). Strangely, the radical left movement (which the HRM accuses of an absence of the explicit recognition of morality) was

²⁷ See Geras (1990: 29, 34). Here, while 'general norms' can become abstract moralism, contingent attitudes can slip into pragmatism. The challenge really is generating political principles that emerge into moral norms, which are in turn open to political practice. How do we combine the self-belief and certainty required for political praxis with the open-endedness necessary to avoid abstract moralism? In the powerful memoir of a communist revolutionary from South Africa, the author writes, 'In 1975 I was a young, very idealistic revolutionary, and I was prepared to die for my beliefs. I felt a strong connection with all those who had gone before me, and with all those who had faced similar tortures; and I felt a responsibility to the traditions of our liberation movement. That is what gave me strength. That is what made my resistance possible. And that is why I did not simply succumb to torture or lapse into despair. Writing this now, 24 years after my arrest, I don't seem as single-minded as I was back then. I now tend to see myself as having been rather naïve. All the same, it remains true that single-mindedness was the weapon that got me through (Suttner 2001: 3).

In other words, how do we generate activists who fight for socialism with certainty and yet are open-ended about its success? For an initial discussion (by no means exhaustive or sufficient) on this issue, see Geras (1994). Further discussion on this point, though necessary, is beyond the scope of this article.

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accused of pure moralism by feminist writers during the Telangana armed struggle. They argued that the Communist Party could not evolve a policy on problems of childbirth, unmarried women and sexuality etc. Women comrades were forced to give away children after they were born and single women were considered a problem. While most cases were settled as and when they arose, the underlying issue they posed was 'diluted into a moral problem, a guilt at having violated family happiness. Once again there is no analysis on it as a political issue that had to be addressed if the movement was serious about women' (Stree Shakti Sanghatana 1989: 27, emphasis mine). As absence of morality is a problem now, the presence of morality was a problem then.

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