

Comprehensive Report on Ph.D research work

During the period of study leave from the college, I substantially worked on my Ph.D research. My Ph.D topic is *Civil Rights Movements in India: A Conceptual Exploration*. I am registered in Ph.D programme of Department of Political Science, University of Delhi since 24 April 2014. My university enrolment number is LSR 84/2000.

I read extensively on the concept of rights exploring various books and articles on the same. Through this exercise, I tried to explore its understandings and meanings in the workings of the civil rights movement. To further build this, I read many reports of civil and democratic rights organizations like People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC). I wrote a preliminary draft on the concept of rights seen through various perspectives and its import for civil and democratic rights movement in India. I also gathered material relevant to tracing the history of civil liberties movement in India. In this context, I visited many libraries like the Central Reference Library, Delhi University, Ratan Tata Library, Delhi School of Economics and Nehru Memorial Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi. I visited the national office of PUCL in Patparganj, Delhi to collect old reports and other civil liberties issues documents available there. On the basis of these, I tried to write a chapter on the History of civil rights movement in India.

To concretize my understanding of civil rights movement, I started exploring it through the various issues that the movement has engaged with over the years and it is through these themes that I tried to locate the movement's engagement with rights, state or justice. The first theme that I took up in this regard was that of custodial violence. Custodial violence has been a consistent theme in the working of civil rights movement in India. To understand it, I did background readings on State, Police, Prison and Custody. Along with it I again read many reports by the civil democratic rights movement on custody deaths and custodial violence. In the preliminary write up on this, I looked at these questions: In what ways has the civil rights movement engaged with the issue of custodial violence? How does it understand custodial violence? Has it through its intervention and work been able to make some changes in context of custodial violence?

The second theme that I took up was that of gender in the work of civil rights movement. The other two themes that I explored were the themes of political violence and agrarian and civil rights movements' engagement with it. So, the thesis focuses on four themes chosen from among a range of concerns around human rights violations with which the movement has engaged. These are: Custodial Violence, Non-State Violence, Agrarian Conflict and Gender Issues.

The thesis has an Introduction, Five Chapters and Conclusion. I revised, reworked on my draft chapters incorporating suggestions and comments from the Supervisor.

A Brief Overview of my Ph.D Thesis is as follows:

The thesis seeks to explore the emergence and unfolding of the civil rights movement in India, the different contexts in which its interventions have assumed importance, the manner in which it articulates the meaning of rights in its engagements with the issues impinging upon the rights of cross-section of people in India, and its invocation of constitutional values and fundamental rights in doing so.

The Central Question that the thesis probed was:

What have been the distinctive aspects of the civil rights movements' engagement with the issues of rights violations of a cross-section of people in India and the importance of this intervention in context of a constitutional state and society in India?

Hypotheses:

- The civil rights movement has so engaged with the issues affecting rights of people so as to contribute to widening the sphere of democratic process in the country, and the pluralization of the mainstream discourse on many issues such as the operation of some laws, structures of social oppression, use of violence by state and non-state actors etc.
- The civil rights movements in India situate itself against the state, thus overbearingly targeting it for failing to protect people's rights.
- The civil rights movement is using gender as an insular category thereby reducing woman question to a case study than seeing it as an integral category to understand various issues that it engages with.

The Thesis studies the interventions of various civil liberties organisations in India, focusing primarily upon the work of People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC). PUDR is Delhi based but conducts its fact-findings in other parts of the country also. PUCL is a national level organization with its units in many states of India. APCLC, now CLC is located in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

This work also studies the documents and reports of other Civil liberties organizations like Human Rights Forum, Association for Protection of Democratic Rights.

Methodology:

- The thesis uses textual analysis of fact-finding reports, press-releases and other documents to study the modalities through which the civil rights organisations have intervened in cases of human rights violations.
- The fact-finding reports of civil rights groups are seen in the thesis as 'social archives'.
- The thesis seeks to study civil rights movements' pursuit of truth seeking which is reflected in the methodology of fact-finding missions. It therefore sees the documentation done in the form of fact-findings by the various civil liberties organizations as a political act as well as a method.
- The thesis adopts comparative method of analysis as the differences and similarities in the interventions of various civil rights organisations have been used and analysed. At the same time the relationship between the context and content of intervention by various civil rights organisations have also been explored.

The Overview of the chapters of the thesis is given below:

The first chapter is titled, *Civil Rights Movement in India: History and Perspectives*. The chapter gives the history of the formation of various civil liberties and democratic rights organizations in India. It goes into the issues that the movement has engaged with highlighting also the issues which have remained contentious for the movement or on which there have been debates and differences amongst organizations like the issue of caste, political violence, and nationality question. Out of the many issues that the movement has raised in last 40 years and discussed in this chapter, four such issues are picked up for further

discussion and analysis. The chapter also analyses the history of civil rights movement through various perspectives drawn from the survey of the literature on the emergence of the civil rights movement.

The second chapter deals with the issue of Custodial Violence. It is titled *Police, Violence and Custody*. The chapter brings out the different dimensions of the issue of custodial violence that the CLDR movement has raised over a period of time. This is seen through five of the major reports and many other smaller reports and leaflets that democratic rights organization PUDR has brought on the issue of custodial violence.

The third chapter explores another dimension of violence, that is, state centred but not perpetrated by the state directly. It is titled, *Political Violence, the Maoists and the Civil Rights Movement*. The chapter details the engagement of the CLDR movement with non-state political violence mainly by Maoist groups in parts of Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. PUDR, PUCL, APDR and joint fact-finding reports have been used in this chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with Gender issues and the movements' engagement, non-engagement with them both at a conceptual level as well as at a practical level. Its title is *Through the Lens of Gender*. The Chapter analyses two kinds of reports released by CLDR groups, the first category of reports that directly address the concerns of gender, and those which deal with other issues but gendered concerns also figure in there. The reports and press statements of PUCL and PUDR are used in this chapter.

The fifth chapter is titled *Agrarian Relations and Civil Rights Movement*. As mentioned above, the chapter deals with Agrarian Conflicts, Agrarian Relations and CLDR movement's interventions in this context. The chapter discusses the major reports of PUDR and PUCL on agrarian conflicts in Bihar from 1979 till 2003.

The last part carries the Conclusion of the thesis. The thesis finds the first hypothesis validated. The four themes studied in the thesis show that the engagement of the civil rights movement has pluralised the mainstream discourse on these issues putting forth the voice of the marginalised. Thereby, it has been able to contribute to widening the sphere of democratic politics in the country. The second hypothesis is found to be differently validated in the sense that the thesis finds the state emerging as an overarching category of analysis and intervention for the movement. The movement continues to act as watch dog on arbitrary use of power by the state. But the thesis also finds that what appears to be an 'anti-state' premise

in the reports of the civil rights organisations, is in fact a critique of the modalities through which the law and order machinery of the state functions, the expectation of accountability from the state, and the understanding that it is the state which is primarily responsible for the protection of the constitutional rights and liberties of the people. In this sense, it can be said that the movement binds the state in India to its constitutional mandate.

The third hypothesis is found to be falsified. Gender issues probed in the thesis show that the movement does not use gender as an insular category and gender concerns are dispersed in the other issues that the movement takes up, e.g. custodial violence.

The other findings of the thesis are:

- Despite its state-centric approach, it has also broadened its areas of concerns to issues such as those arising out of developmental destruction like resource plunder, displacement and resettlement, denial of rights for the LGBT community, honour killings, environmental concerns, caste violence.
- The movement contextualises the use of violence by non-state actors and invokes constitutional limits on the use of violence by state actors such as police and other armed force.
- A very important aspect of the interventions of civil rights movement in the form of fact-findings, has been that it tries to locate the violations involved in a particular incident in the larger socio-economic context and sometimes also tries to trace its historical roots.
- There is a continuous engagement with the conceptions of rights in the work of civil rights movement. Rights are invoked in myriad ways – as individual and group rights, natural and positivist sources of rights, negative and positive rights, rights as liberties and social and economic rights. The source is not only the constitution of India but the struggles of the people that expand the domain of rights. Rights are therefore seen as continuously being shaped, claimed and reclaimed.

Publications during the course of Ph.D research work:

1. भारतीय नागरिक स्वतंत्रता एवं जनवादी अधिकार आंदोलन, अभय प्रसाद सिंह (सम्पादित)
समकालीन भारत में विकास की प्रक्रिया और सामाजिक आंदोलन, ओरिएंट ब्लैकस्वान, 2015.

2. 'Civil and Democratic Rights Movement in India' in Abhay Prasad Singh (ed.) *Development Process and Social Movements in Contemporary India*, Pinnacle Learning, Third Revised Edition, 2018.
3. Making the '*Invisible*' Visible: Custodial Violence and the Civil Liberties-Democratic Rights Movement in India, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, Forthcoming.

Paper Presentations:

1. 'Rights Conceptualisations in the Civil and democratic Rights Movement in India' in the ICSSR Northern Regional Centre sponsored Workshop Laws and Rights organised by Gargi College, University of Delhi, 4 February 2017.
2. 'Rights, Oppression and Power: Exploring the Conception of rights in Civil and Democratic Rights Movement in India' in National Seminar on Human Rights in 21st Century India: Emerging Issues and Challenges, Motilal Nehru College (Evening), 29 March 2017.
3. Pre-Submission Ph.D Seminar at Dept. of Political Science, University of Delhi, 8 July 2020.

Thanking You

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