**Rights are global**

BY A . G. N O O R A N I 2021-03-13

STATES have a brazenly inconsistent behaviour whenever their conduct on human rights towards their own citizens is criticised by foreigners especially by foreign governments or their human rights activists.

It began with prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, became worse under Indira Gandhi and has reached its nadir under Narendra Modi.

Indira Gandhi`s remarks at a press conference on Oct 15, 1983, were presumptuous to a degree. She said, `We don`t interfere in the internal af fairs of other countries. But it has never prevented us from expressing our views strongly,` adding, `we support democratic regimes in other countries. But we also have a policy of coexistence with military dictatorship, monarchies and other types of government`.

When the International League of Human Rights accused the Indian government in a letter to the UN secretary general, of violation of human rights, India`s permanent mission at the UN was instructed to retort, on June 7, 1976, that `the protection of fundamental human rights is the concern of each sovereign state and is a matter which is essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of member states of the United Nations`. It put forward the opinions of South Africa, the Soviet Union, Chile and such.

Others were no more principled, either.

Soon af ter Jimmy Carter became president, he declared in a speech, at the UN in 1977, `no member of the United Nations can claim that mistreatment of its citizens is solely its own business. Equally, no member can avoid its responsibilities to review and to speak when torture or unwarranted deprivation of freedom occurs in any part of the world`.

Surely the citizen does not pay taxes to enable his government to conduct a missionary campaign on human rights, but only to promote `the national interest`.

Never before has India`s record on human rights plummeted to such depths as they now have under the `RSS regime` of Narendra Modi with Muslims as the prime, but not the sole, target. Christians come next.

It was not long after he came to power in May 2014 that his deeds and words attracted international criticism. It has reached a crescendo this year. The international human rights community bestirred itself.

Modern agitations need a style, strategy and tactics while shunning violence scrupulously. Sheryl Gay Stolberg`s report from Boston in The New York Times of Feb 16, 2011, was an eye-opener: `Halfway around the world from Tahrir Square in Cairo, an ageing American intellectual shuf fles about his cluttered brick row house in a working-classneighbourhood here. His name is Gene Sharp. Stoop-shouldered and white-haired at 83, he grows orchids, has yet to master the internet and hardly seems like a dangerous man ...

... [For] decades, his practical writings on non-violent revolution most notably From Dictatorship to Democracy, a 93-page guide to toppling autocrats, available for download in 24 languages have inspired dissidents around the world, including in Burma, Bosnia, Estonia and Zimbabwe, and now Tunisia and Egypt.

`When Egypt`s April 6 Youth Movement was struggling to recover from a failed effort in 2005, its leaders tossed around `crazy ideas` about bringing down the government, said Ahmed Maher, a leading strategist. They stumbled on Mr Sharp while examining the Serbian movement Otpor, which he had influenced. When the nonpartisan International Centre on Nonviolent Conflict, which trains democracy activists, slipped into Cairo several years ago to con-duct a workshop, among the papers it distributed was Mr Sharp`s `198 Methods of Nonviolent Action` a list of tactics that range from hunger strikes to `protest disrobing` to `disclosing identities of secret agents`.

Dalia Ziada, an Egyptian bloggerand activist who attended the workshop and later organised similar sessions on her own, said trainees were active in both the Tunisia and Egypt revolts. She said that some activists translated excerpts of Mr Sharp`s work into Arabic, and that this message of `attacking weaknesses of dictators` stuck with them.

The foreign friends of Indian dissidents did not send them AK-47 or machine guns.

Only literature of this kind which illiterate babus and their stooges in the media call `tool kits`. Repression has found a companion in illiteracy. There is no denying the f act that the world has become a global village and that world f amilies` problems become a matter of concern to the entire village. The clock cannot be turned back. The world has to wrestle with this problem. The claims of the world community with regard to the observance of human rights must be reconciled with the core of the countries genuine feelings about matters domestic. The writer is an author and a lawyer based in Mumbai.