PREFACE

Liberty has been a key theme of political philosophy. The constant dilemma before political philosophers has been the issue of reconciling man's natural inclination towards freedom, with organisation and control which are the primary characteristics of the State. The continuous quest has been to make possible an orbit of freedom for an individual, harmonise it with similar claims of other individuals and reconcile it with the needs of the state for a degree of autonomy to enable it to regulate competing claims and maintain order and stability.

Liberal democratic theory has attempted to balance the inherent contradiction between the claims of the individual and the authority of the State by emphasising the principle of accountability of authority and buttressing it with institutional mechanisms like fundamental rights enshrined in written constitutions, right to franchise and separation of powers.

However institutional mechanisms alone cannot protect and preserve liberty. Constant vigilance alone is the best guarantor of liberty.

Constraints to liberty may arise from the prevailing economic arrangements in society. Thus a
grossly unequal distribution of income, wealth and resources can also restrict liberty. Poverty thus has grave consequences for liberty. For people caught in a miasma of poverty, liberties would remain but a paper promise. Moreover deprivation gives rise to grave social problems like the prevalence of bonded labour, child labour, women's exploitation, criminalisation, problem of shelter, homelessness, etc., which also tend to diminish liberty.

Further, liberty may be restricted by certain customs and institutions prevailing in society. For example, in the case of women, the patriarchal organisation of society gives rise to social practices which restrict women from exercising their fundamental rights. Thus societal practices too restrict liberty.

Protection of liberty therefore calls for dedicated and committed action, apart from constant vigilance on the part of individuals and groups.

In recent years, there have appeared on the Indian scene several groups and organisations variously described as Voluntary Organisations, People's Organisations, Action Groups, Social Action Groups, etc. which have grown up around some perception of the problem of poverty, denial and marginalisation faced by the poor and deprived sections.
While some voluntary organisations aim to contain the repression and force that inheres in the machinery of the State, others are constructively involved in assisting the process of development by evolving methods which do not adversely effect other segments of society. Still others attempt to assist suppressed and vulnerable groups, e.g., tribals and women, to assert themselves to fight for their civil liberties. Some organisations are also involved in framing development projects which would encourage self-reliance among these target groups.

Much of this activity is located at the grass-roots level, for owing to the wide-spread prevalence of poverty and ignorance at this level, many and frequent inroads are made on the civil liberties of the people. Moreover the entrenched class-power dominance at these levels often prevents the State from making much of an impact on the lives of the poor and down-trodden.

From the vast array of voluntary organisations, we have selected two categories as subjects of detailed study and analysis in this study. The first category consists of those which are directly concerned with the issue of civil liberties. This includes organisations like the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and the Citizens for Democracy (CFD). The second category
includes organisations which have made Women's rights the subject of their concern. These are Manushi and Suraksha.

Even civil liberties organisations which initially concerned themselves with civil liberties in the individual-state equation, have now expanded the scope of their activities and concerns to include threats to civil liberties arising from poverty and marginalisation of the poor. The orbit of their concerns therefore has become comprehensive and diverse, encompassing issues like the condition of undertrials, problems of slum dwellers, problems arising from industrialisation and urbanisation, bonded labour, etc.

The issue of women's rights and status is another facet of the complex subject of civil liberties and its interdependencies. It brings into sharp focus the question of the complex interlacing of social structures and economic forces working towards depriving women of their civil liberties. This deprivation is particularly apparent in the case of women belonging to the weaker sections of the society.

The struggle of the women's groups extends beyond the state which guarantees fundamental rights, to cover oppression which is endemic in society. It also encompasses prevalent and deep-rooted social structures.
and attitudes because ultimately the key to improving the lot of women lies beyond mere constitutional guarantees and social legislation, in a change in social attitudes.

In the following study "Civil Liberties and the State in India: A Study of the Role of Some Voluntary Organisations", Chapter I takes a look at the evolution of the idea of natural rights in which the notion of liberty has its moorings.

Chapter II an attempt is made to define the terrain of Voluntary Organisations. Part I raises the question: "What are Voluntary Organisations?"; Part II traces the relationship of the Indian State with Voluntary Organisations; and, Part III attempts to understand the recent phenomenon of Grass-roots Voluntary Organisations.

Chapter III entitled "Outlining the Parameters of State Control" explores the civil liberties groups we have picked for examination and is divided into four parts. Beginning with a short Introduction, it goes on to discuss in Part II the activities and working of the Citizens for Democracy. Part III, closely examines the two groups - the People's Union for Civil Liberties and
the People's Union for Democratic Rights. The Chapter concludes with Part IV which is an analysis of the working of all these groups.

Chapter IV takes an overview of organisations upholding women's rights in India tracing the history of such efforts from the Social Reform Movement to the National Movement, the post-independence period and upto the post-1975 period.

In Chapter V, dealing with the two women's organisations selected for detailed study, is again divided into two parts. Part I covers Manushi and Part II is devoted to the study of the other women's voluntary organisation, viz., Suraksha.

Chapter VI of the study attempts to discuss certain conclusions about the role of voluntary organisations in enhancing liberty.