Human rights as a concept, practice, and concern has always been associated with the United States owing to the fact that the very foundation of the nation was laid on the principles of human rights and liberty. If President Roosevelt gave human rights prominence on the international stage during the 2nd World War, it was President Carter who placed the issue squarely on the American agenda in the late 1970s by linking human rights and foreign policy. But American foreign policy has always given prominence to the protection of its national interest, security and economic prosperity. Nowhere is it more evident than during the Cold War era when the U.S. supported military dictatorships, engineered coups and assassinations, and escalated the arms race in many Latin American countries, in the Middle East, Pakistan, and Indo-China. The end of Cold War generated broad optimism that human rights would take centre stage, not only in American foreign policy but in world politics as a whole. It was assumed that the global revolutions in communications and commerce would inevitably carry domestic political ideas and economic practices into even the most repressive and backward societies. Economic and trade issues aside, the central theme of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign for presidency was the issue of protection of human rights. But, in the face of reality the Clinton administration failed to honour its commitment in this regard. Some of the failures include Bosnia, Rwanda, and Haiti.

The post Cold War dilemma in American foreign policy concerning human rights gets accentuated by voices, particularly from Asia, that challenge American human rights initiatives as cultural imperialism. But the main bone of contention is the attempt by
developed nation to link the practice of human rights with trade, without taking into account the specific socio-cultural milieu of a country. This linkage has met with vociferous criticism because the underlying idea behind it is economic protectionism. The entire debate concerning the ‘social clause’ is perceived as fraught with double standards. The developed nations have been guilty of violating the human rights of people in many developing countries, thus generating scepticism about the sincerity of the U.S. toward promoting human rights.

A new dimension has been added to the conventional development model i.e. globalization. That it would have a crucial impact on the question of human rights is a foregone conclusion. Although globalization has resulted in the proliferation of grassroots movement for empowerment of the hitherto oppressed classes, its relationship with human rights has resulted in some negative fallout. The poorer countries have lost out in terms of unequal economic power between rich countries and trans-national companies and themselves. In a more specific manner, the threat is in terms of impoverishment of the very poor who are often marginalised and made poorer as other parts of the economies of developing countries are drawn into the global economy. Also, there is threat of ‘homogenisation of cultures’ in the face of a pervasive model of modern development. The U.S., being the harbinger of the new globalizing force economically, politically and socially, it is imperative to understand and analyze how the Clinton administration has used the concept of human rights in its foreign policy and how forces of globalization has impacted American policy on human rights. The thesis would undertake two case-studies: China and India. The reason for choosing these countries lies in their diverse socio-political milieu. China is an authoritarian country, ruled by the
Chinese Communist Party whereas India is a thriving democracy. The different approaches adopted by the U.S. to address its human rights concerns in these countries would be an enlightening exercise toward revealing the motives behind America’s human rights rhetoric.

The introductory chapter, titled Introduction, sheds light on the philosophic foundations of human rights and traces the rise of human rights as an issue in American foreign policy. The next chapter, Globalization and the Contours of American Human Rights Policy, attempts to understand the origin and trends in globalization as well as its impact on the issue of human rights. The chapter also explores the effect of globalization on American human rights policy. The third chapter, Human Rights and Clinton’s Foreign Policy, examines the genesis of President Clinton’s policy of humanitarian intervention, which was formulated to emphasize his commitment to human rights. The chapter also highlights the successes and failures of his humanitarian policy by examining the various cases where he implemented the policy. The fourth chapter, A Historical Perspective of Indo-U.S. and Sino-U.S. Relations, studies U.S. relations with India and China after both countries established themselves as sovereign nations. Scrutinizing the history of American relations with both countries bring clarity in understanding the present relationship with both countries. The fifth and sixth chapters, respectively titled as The Kashmir Dispute in Indo-U.S. Relations and Economic and Social Issues in Indo-American Relations, deal with the stand taken by the U.S. on the Kashmir issue and on the issue of child labour. The Clinton administration, during its first term, seemed insensitive to India’s concern about cross-border terrorism and insurgencies and became
vocal critics of human rights violation in Kashmir. However, Clinton became muted in his criticism during the second term. The fifth chapter attempts an examination of the motive behind raising the issue of human rights and later backtracking on it. The sixth chapter scrutinizes America’s socio-economic relationship with India. While the U.S. was quick to take advantage of India’s economic liberalization, it employed certain tactics to protect its own economy such as invoking the ‘social clause,’ which links trade with child labour. The chapter discusses whether such a clause genuinely helps the cause of child labour or is a protectionist ploy of the U.S. The seventh chapter, U.S.-China Relations during Clinton Administration, examines the issues that affected China’s relations with the U.S. during the Clinton administration. Though the administration has been verbally critical of China’s human rights record, such criticism has not resulted in much punitive action as is evident from the de-linking of trade issues from human rights and its stance on Taiwan and Tibet. The chapter scrutinizes the reason behind such a lenient attitude to China’s human rights record. In Conclusion, an attempt has been made to compare Sino-U.S. relations with the of Indo-U.S. relations to highlight the discriminatory nature of American human rights policy. The chapter concludes that such discrimination has undermined America’s human rights policy. It also concludes that globalization has led to the marginalization of human rights where trade is a predominant factor.

New Delhi
June 2006

Kaushiki Sanyal