

Human Rights Education: Making Inclusive in Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Human rights education aims at providing students with the abilities to accompany and produce societal changes. Education is seen as a way to empower people, improve their quality of life and increase their capacity to participate in the decision-making processes leading to social, cultural and economic policies (UNESCO). Human Rights Education is an indispensable part of the right to education and has of late gained larger recognition as a human right itself. The knowledge of the rights and freedoms, of oneself as much as of the others, is considered as a fundamental tool to guarantee the respect of all rights for each and every person. The key stone of human rights education is that the education should not only aim at producing trained professional workers but also inculcating in them a sense of higher purpose. Human rights education aims at providing students and people at large with the abilities to accomplish and produce societal changes. Education is widely acknowledged and seen as a way to empower people to improve their quality of life and increase their capacity to participate in the decision making process, leading to desired transformation in the social, cultural and economic policies. In fact, to achieve sustainable development, it is essentially important that education ought to be viewed from multifocal lens and that encompasses every single dimension of human development. The human development index reveals the prosperity of a nation in terms of economic growth, but also in the most vital areas like education, social, political and other development related areas. We however feel that there is no harm in making a beginning in the light of available reflections and personal experiences to provide a critique of HRE trajectories in India with a view to help identify core areas of challenges that require to be addressed.

Keyword

Human Rights Education (HRE)

Introduction

Human Rights, intrinsic to all humans as members of humanity, are the modern and secular version of the natural rights. All humans, being born equal are equally entitled to the Human Rights without any distinction of birth, sex, race, status, religion, language or nationality. Standing above the ideologies of the capitalism or communism, Human Rights reflect the concern for democracy, development and peace. The genesis of development of a nation is gauged on the scale of education which leads to economic, social and other developments. Thus, higher the Educational development of a country more it leads to prosperity, more the prosperity better are people of the nation, and the betterment of the people needs to ranking of the nation in the world map. To achieve such multifaceted goals for education, it is essentially important to imbibe the values of human rights among children, particularly at the formative years.

Historical Overview

Over the last five decades, ever since the Universal Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, there has been a considerable accumulation of human rights instruments, running into hundreds in quantity. The proliferation happened not only at the international level, wherein besides the United Nations, intergovernmental agencies such as International Labor Organization and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also actively embraced paths of standard setting in their respective fields of work in the light of human rights principles, but also at the regional and national levels. Simultaneously there has been a continuous search to make the concept of human rights inclusive of the various contexts and the varied human and political experiences of citizens/people.

Bringing Rights consciousness into Human Rights Education Putting Human Rights Education in place has created an equally important need for generating pedagogic and research processes, i.e., establishing institutional structures, providing necessary financial and academic resources and materials etc., to meet the requirements of generating a large number of subject specialists, e.g., human rights lawyers and social activists, who would engage with the processes in an informed and committed manner. The NHRC had the dossiers transliterated to suit the High School level syllabus as well the wider public, i.e. civil society organizations. There are several categories of Human Rights which are; 1.Child Rights 2.Dalit Rights 3.Human Rights and the Environment 4.Land and Housing Rights 5. Home based Workers' rights 6.Right to Information 7.Right to Education 8.Right to Food 9.Fish Workers' Struggle for Human Rights 10.Rights of the Disabled 11.Reproductive Rights 12 Gandhian Rights.

The United Nations World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 was the first meeting since 1968 on Rights as a source of Education, and it became a natural vehicle to highlight the new visions of human rights thinking and practice being developed by women. The global conferences in the 1980s and 1990s proved to be fertile ground for raising issues of violence against women and which included the active participation of NGOs. During the 1970s and 80s there was an increase in “the development of human rights norms in various international and regional treaties”. The interaction between the UN and the NGOs also

increased, and organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch started playing a more central role in defining norms.

Human Rights and Teacher Education

The social sciences being taught at various levels of school education are already disseminating human rights education to the children and are creating positive conditions for a better understanding of human rights in the young minds. But, unfortunately, little effort has been made to create human rights education, sensitivity and skills amongst those who are imparting education at the secondary and higher secondary school levels. One of the foremost important mechanisms to address the issue of human rights at school level needs to have a module for teacher training program, which would be able to provide an appropriate level of input to the teachers who are involved and concerned with the human rights education at the school level. In this regard, the syllabus developed for framing the human rights module on issues of concern would equip the teachers to deal in a better way with the human rights education. Thus, in turn, the teachers would be able to address the issue of human rights and imparting the same to the young children in the school much more systematically and effectively. Perhaps, in the same context, it would also add issue of human rights in more practical manner. In addition, this model may also help create a unique blend of practical as well as theoretical knowledge of the issue of concern and would go a long way in creating a society full of tolerance, mutual respect, and dignity and, on top of this, sensitivity towards all by all.

Creation of a strong and pro-active human rights community has been long overdue in India. Human rights can be most effectively imbibed through a well thought out program of education. In fact, education becomes purposive and relevant only when ingrained with human rights education. The task of human rights education can be focused at two distinct levels, namely (a) at the level of the imparters of primary, secondary and higher secondary education and (b) at the level of receivers of education. Notwithstanding the special importance of those who receive education, the present curriculum development exercise has focused on the imparters of the education front. The exercise of developing a human rights curriculum for primary, secondary and higher secondary is being undertaken by the NCERT separately, and it is hoped that very soon their efforts would begin impacting our country's education system at lower levels. In addition, the CBSE has also evolved a syllabus for human rights education at lower education level, which came into force w.e.f. 2008.

To nurture the value and culture of human rights in the child during the formative years, there is a serious need not only to think along these lines but also to work on the modalities by which it could be achieved. Keeping this in mind, the Commission constituted a Task Force to look at the prevailing human rights education scenario at school level right across the country, based on the information collected by the Commission, and to suggest as to how the human rights education could be made more effective at the school level, there is a need to create human resources. The effectiveness of human rights education at school level can only be achieved in a sustainable manner provided we, at the first place, create trained manpower in order not only to disseminate human rights education but also to teach human rights education at this level of education which

is regarded as formative year of children in terms of more effective technique and with an appropriate level of field experience, etc.

Thus, it is essentially important that we should have an appropriate model of human rights leading to address each issue of concern and, such model need to be imbibed in teachers training program, besides its inclusion in other professional degree program leading to B.Ed. M.Ed. LT and others. Thus, it is essentially important to evolve a syllabus which may be used in developing modules on various dimensions of human rights and be used for teachers training for in-service teachers in particular, and for professional future teachers undertaking B.Ed. courses, M.Ed. courses and other courses concerning the school, secondary and higher secondary education. The module which has envisaged and emerged has been carefully drafted in view not only of the existing human rights education but also taking full count of the recent advancement in the knowledge of human rights.

There has to be a clear roadmap on how to make education perform this important role of transformation in the attitudes and psyche of the persons engaged in teaching and education, else attaining these objectives will remain elusive. The planning to orient teachers of upper primary to secondary stages on human rights and evolving with them modalities of human rights teaching is based on certain basic premises that require total understanding of conditions of violation and sustenance of human rights. With this aspiration in mind, the National Human Rights Commission has facilitated a process of developing syllabus and curriculum guidelines of human rights education for the teachers of schools up to secondary level.

The primary aim is to help organizing teachers' training across the country through a focused module that would enable grooming teachers at B.Ed. courses to be informed about the key human rights concepts with reference to realities in India and abroad. As a cascading effect of this exercise, the child citizens of India will develop human rights mindset in school environment. On the one hand, this will help them perceive the violations of human rights in society at large as their own, and, on the other, will share their deprivations with those to whom human rights mean the most. The coverage of syllabus is designed keeping in mind that while teachers will know why there are human rights, they will be informed about the genesis and basic tenets of human rights. The teachers will learn how to infuse human rights components in the subject of study and then taking it down to the classroom to inspire students to acquire knowledge and capacity from rights-based perspectives. The curriculum would try to create appropriate human rights education modules for teaching professionals dealing with students at different levels i.e., primary, secondary and higher secondary.

Legal Aspects of Human Right's Education

It is a great pleasure to thank Justice Y. Bhaskar Rao, Member, NHRC, R. K. Bhargava, Secretary General, NHRC and Aruna Sharma, Joint Secretary for their committed and effective supervision during the course of the development of syllabus leading to teachers' training module on human rights concern. The National Human Rights Commission is of firm conviction and belief that the introduction of human rights syllabus leading to development of teachers' training module on human rights concern would go a long way in setting the human rights

culture not only in the school system but also in the young minds who are the future of the nation.

Human rights education, human rights into education aim at providing pupils and students with the abilities to accompany and produce societal changes. Education is seen as a way to empower people, improve their quality of life and increase their capacity to participate in the decision-making processes leading to social, cultural and economic policies (UNESCO). The concept underpinning human rights education is that education should not only aim at forming trained, professional workers, but also at contributing to the development of individuals who possess the skills to interact in a society. Human rights education and dissemination is a fundamental human right. This imposes on governments in particular great responsibilities to explicate, propagate and disseminate human rights principles and their protection mechanisms. The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights Education and Dissemination, “The true republic: *men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less.*”

The UGC has invited applications from universities, deemed universities and colleges to start new human rights courses at three levels: Masters, Post-Graduate Diploma and Certificate, each level carrying a set of financial incentives. The CDC comprised of 17 members drawn from various walks of life related to human rights theory and practice. The committee met during June 2000 and December 2001 and finally prepared its report in early 2002. The effect does not confine to UGC alone, though by far that is the most significant and systematic one. The other government initiatives include: the efforts of NCERT in generating materials and debate about the introduction of human rights and citizenship education at the school level including evolving a model curriculum; the contributions of few state level human rights commissions to the education process; a general sense of thrust given to human rights literacy in many government establishments. In such a scenario it is quite natural that even organizations of civil society would participate in the HRE initiatives. By far there is no study on the extent of voluntary or civil society initiatives in HRE, but again can be inferred from some of the experiences of institutions and individuals engaged in HRE processes.

What seems to be reasonably clear is that there are widespread HRE initiatives undertaken by voluntary and civil society organizations. The nature of interventions ranges from organizing awareness workshops, conducting ‘training’ programs for specially identified groups such as journalists, lawyers in small towns, social activists or even simply citizenry at large. Few organizations such as the Indian Social Institute have embarked on conducting a regular stream of programmes for social activists. The significant growth of the ‘human rights sector’ over the last two decades has also contributed to more frequent HRE interventions within civil society.

A Perspective on Challenges to HRE brings us to a crucial question of analyzing the developments in HRE initiatives in India located in the larger international landscape, For example, NLSIU in Bangalore has over the last few years regularly associated with conducting human rights literacy programs for Foreman trainees in the Foreman Training Institute. Through discussions with the establishment we understood that it was a decision at the higher levels of the organization to make human rights literacy a compulsory part of the regular curriculum for the trainees. While it is common nowadays to refer the growth of professional voluntary organizations (e.g. NGOs) specializing in human rights activity as ‘human rights sector’ it is not

entirely free from controversy. For our purpose it refers to that part of civil society (NGOs) engaged in human rights activity which is different from the 'voluntary' social action groups dealing with human rights issues (eg. PUCL). One of the major implications of the rise of the human rights sector is need to professionalize human rights activity.

Conclusion

We however feel that there is no harm in making a beginning in the light of available reflections and personal experiences to provide a critique of HRE trajectories in India with a view to help identify core areas of challenges that require to be addressed, first to realize the substantive spirit of the aims and objective of the HRE and the follow up World programme on Human Rights Education, second, highlighting issues that could help HRE initiatives context sensitive and meaningful to Indian circumstances and third to make compulsory HRE at all levels and types of education to make it meaningful. In other words, the human rights values need to be set in the young minds so as to create a society full of people who have an understanding to respect the rights of fellow beings, and it would lead to a sustainable development where equality, opportunity, and mutual respect would be the order of the day. For addressing all these issues, there is a need to create an appropriate mechanism to address various issues of human rights education and concerns. In this regard, the national curriculum for school education of NCERT has already included the human rights education component in the social science subjects. To achieve multifaceted goals for education, it is essentially important to imbibe the values of human rights among children, particularly at the formative years.

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