



HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: A VIEWPOINT

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INTRODUCTION:

The subject of human rights is not new. It has been ingrained in the societies from time immemorial. This topic has assumed a great importance in the contemporary world due to the result of gross violations of these rights. Human rights are the rights which are essential for leading a good normal and dignified life as a human being. Human rights can be generally defined as those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence and other needs. Human rights are sometimes also called fundamentals rights or basic rights or even natural rights. Another way to describe them would be to call them "common rights" for they are the rights, which all men and women in the world should share. These are inalienable rights of all members of human family. Human rights means the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the international covenants and enforceable by courts in India.⁴ These are those minimum rights, which every individual must have against the state or other public authority by virtue of his being a human being.⁵ As a matter of fact, human rights can be termed as universal and politically identified human values. The contemporary conception of human rights, though rooted in the rich heritage of past, is of recent origin and was reflected for the first time in the Charter of the United Nations which was adopted in 1945.

It will not be inappropriate to say that violation of human rights has become every day event in our civilized societies. Gross and flagrant violations of human rights have created a necessity for such efforts at the international as well as national level, for creating such an environment where these rights can be promoted as well as protected. There is a widely felt need to correct the current situation of galloping increase in violation of human rights in a grow-in culture in the home, on the street and in the villages. Mere inclusion of these rights in various statutes was a big achievement, much more was required to be done like making people aware about their rights and developing such a spirit and culture where people, while enjoying their rights, would give due respect to the rights of other human beings. This is an area, which has been neglected not only at the national as well as at international level, which demands human rights education that is the real need of the society and which can promote respect for these rights. It is only in the last few years that the importance of education in relation to human rights has attracted the attention of national policy-makers, educationists and education planners.



It is only in the recent decades that these rights are increasingly becoming the subjects of concern for national lawyers, activists, reformers, policy-makers and other citizenry which has been the result of the various reasons like:

- (a) Growing realization of government activists, elite, opinion builders and constitutionalists that constitutions of most of the nations believing in the rule of law incorporate explicitly the provisions of various international covenants on human rights in one way or the other. This led to the realization that human rights have a significant role to play in the national context;
- (b) Emergence of large number of NGOs at the national as well as international level;
- (c) End of Cold War led to shift in attention of human rightists and others from serving the cause of ideological war to relating human rights movement to issues of social justice and distributive justice;
- (d) Emergence of other movements like feminist movement, environmental protection movement, etc.

All the above factors lead communities and us to believe that in the centuries to come, the extent of human development, prosperity and peace would largely depend on the degree or the realization of these rights at global level in general and national level in particular.

Respect for human rights as a part of its social philosophy has existed in the Indian ethos for a long time. Respect and realization of human rights requires evolving a culture. Cultivation and promotion of human rights culture is the sine qua non for the smooth functioning of the organs of a democratic state and for the kind of development that results into over all development of each member of the society. It respects the need for ensuring to everyone, equal opportunities for growth and development to every individual and group of people. Human rights education is meant to be given to school and colleges students so that they become sensitive and aware individuals and realize that as human beings, all of us have an equal right to think to express ourselves, to earn a livelihood, to live in a self-respecting manner and no individual is entitled to snatch these rights away from anyone else. As a matter of the fact, these principles have been enshrined in our constitution and various other laws and are taught in our schools and colleges in the form of civics and social studies. The whole purpose of teaching social studies in its present form taught to be turn into better citizens and better social beings and therefore better human beings. This education is designed to inculcate in us a consciousness of our rights and duties and the responsibility for upholding our fellow human beings rights. But reality is somewhat different. It has become just another means of securing better marks. The introduction of these subjects in our school and college curricula has failed in its purpose. For this reason, there has been a great need for reforming and revamping school and college curriculum and for these purposes various agencies both at national and international level had done substantial work.

Role of National Human Rights Commission in Spreading Human Rights Education in India

Education is one of the most potent mediums to spread the messages of the human rights and to ensure that corresponding change in attitude and values is brought about to ensure a long term impact.¹¹ It is highly unfortunate that even in the institutions of higher learning, the curriculum, including for law courses, rarely makes a mention of human rights even after fifty years of their proclamation. As a matter of fact, it is proper to give this issue an urgent thought now and make it an essential component of our educational system. In a vast country like India, human rights touch and embrace almost every facet of life.¹² An array of examples can be cited. In fifty years of independence, the United Nations has evolved many covenants, principles and standards, and almost all of them have been incorporated in the social legislation, substantive and procedural laws by India. Various efforts have been done at national level for promotion of human rights education. The Constitution of India in its Preamble, Fundamentals Rights and in the Directive Principles of State Policy has incorporated all the principles contained in the Universal Declaration.¹³ The Indian Constitution contains provisions under various articles like Articles 14, 15, 16, 19, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29(1), 30, 38(1), 39, 41, 45 and 46 to safeguard human rights. The concept of human rights, its importance and observance at global level was first sensitized by the United Nations. In the year 1978, a U.N. Seminar at Geneva had recommended the establishment of national institutions for the promotion, protection and greater realization of human rights. A number of guidelines for the structure and functioning of national institutions were also laid down. As a result the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 was passed. It is a



comprehensive piece of legislation, which apart from setting up the National Human Rights Commission, also envisages State Human Rights Commission at the state level and Human Rights Courts at district level for better protection of human rights. The NHRC has taken measures for the promotion of human rights literacy in the country, in pursuance of its functions outlined in section 12(h) of Act of 1993. Section 12(h) of the statute requires the Commission "to spread human rights literacy among various sections of society and promote awareness of the safeguards available for the protection of these rights through publications, the media, seminars and other available means. The Commission has worked intensively for mobilizing the education system, human rights education for police personnel, for para-military and armed forces personnel, political parties, organised seminars and workshops, engaged in publications and research work.¹⁴ The NHRC has suggested to the government that subjects pertaining to human rights be given wider coverage in textbooks. It is learnt that the National Council of Educational research and Training (NCERT) is ^ now conducting a programme of textbook evaluation from the point of view of national integration. Under this programme it will also be seen that elimination of passages prejudicial to the protection of human rights from school textbooks is done. The NCERT has published a 'Source Book' on human rights to make it available to teachers and students, policy makers and other personnel involved in Education Industrial Project Profile. Justice J.S. Verma has written to chairpersons of all 11 State Commissions to re-dedicate themselves for developing a human rights culture in every sphere for developing sphere of life and instrument of governance.¹⁵ A former chief justice, justice M.N. Venkatchalliah says that time has come to make serious efforts to fully channelise material resources for the benefit of our civil society. He also said that education is the only means for individual and social emancipation, which will help the children to combat the cynicism and disturbances that creep up into the student's lives.¹⁶ He further said, "the next century is going to be dominated by knowledge system and prosperity will entirely depend upon the proper utilization and optimization of knowledge as it in itself may not lead to significant value addition in economic activities unless it is coupled with innovations."¹⁷ Laying stress on women's education, he said that by educating women we could find solution to every problem facing the society.

The NHRC has suggested inclusion of 'human rights' as a course of study in the school curriculum with a view to creating awareness among children. R.N. Mishra, the former Chief Justice of India said that democracy cannot survive without respect for and "sincere efforts should be made to promote and protect them at every level." To spread the human rights culture in the country through meaningful, focused education, the NHRC is setting up an institute in Bangalore.²⁰ For the first time in the country, the Maharaja Agrasen College at Delhi offer a degree course in human rights from the academic session beginning 1999-2000.²¹ A.K. Dogra, deputy secretary, UGC has said, "Education can play a crucial role in promoting the human rights culture in the country."

Role of Non Governmental Organisations in Spreading Human Rights Education

Various governmental as well as non-governmental organizations have been set up at state as well as national level. Role played by the NGOs is worth noting. As a matter of fact, NGOs have played a tremendous role in promotion of human rights culture in the country. They have been established to induce a culture where all citizens respect each other, especially human rights, thereby preventing violations of human rights and providing all necessary services to obtain efficacious redressal. A new NGO, Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) have been established at Dehra Dun.²⁴ An Advisory Committee established for the amendment of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 has suggested that the National and State Human Rights Commissions be empowered to select staff of their choice from the government and non-government sectors for more effective working of NGOs as well as governmental sectors.²⁵ The Decade on Human Rights Education for empowerment by the World Non-Governmental Organisations' Coalition was launched in 1991. Its major theme is to introduce culture specificity in the educational process. It stressed to make attempt to evolve basic ideas for a culture-centric pedagogy, which can act as basic bricks in building a new educational process, particularly to develop a culturist curriculum for teaching human rights.²⁶ It has been established that only the proper and effective functioning of NGOs can help in the effective implementation of human rights.



IXth Plan Approach of the UGC Regarding Human Rights Education

This plan has laid stress on existing human rights education in universities and colleges in our country, which lack intensity and understanding of human rights education that need to be strengthened. To ensure comprehensiveness and incorporation of national, regional and international perspectives, the broad contents of courses on human rights need to cover the following:

- (a) Philosophical and cultural bases and historical theories and movements (national as well as international)
- (b) Interdependence of and 'linkages between human rights and democracy, pluralism, development, ecological balance, peace and harmony at the national as well as international level.
- (c) To study the national perspective of HRE.
- (d) To study the regional perspectives of HRE.
- (e) To study the international perspectives of HRE.

It also includes certain other contents but due to shortage of space they are not being referred here.

Recommendations of Justice S.K. Sikri Committee Appointed by the UGC

These recommendations have stressed on inclusion of HRE in curriculums at various levels.

(A) Teaching of Human Rights at School and +2 Level

At the primary stage, the values of human rights and their awareness could best be inculcated through stories, poems, biographies and such other literature. Sufficient space must be devoted to human rights in the civics paper. The presentation should not merely be dry, descriptive and chronological, but should be such as to arouse the curiosity and conscience of the student to the importance, painful evolution, and realization of HR. The perspectives for the course content on HR for class XI could be in the history of civilization for Arts students, HR must receive a due place and importance by the incorporation of a substantial chapter on the theme.

(B) Human Rights Education at the Under-Graduate Level

It is suggested that HRE may be introduced (a) as a paper in the courses for political science and law; (b) simultaneously, the universities may also consider introduction of HR as a separate subject like political science, economics, history etc.

(C) Human Rights Teaching at the Post-Graduate Level

At post-graduate level, the concerned departments of political science/law in selected universities could be persuaded to introduce:

- a) A Diploma Course in HR, and/or
- b) Two or more optional semester courses on specialized aspects of HR for MA (political science) and/or law.

International Efforts in Spreading Human Rights Education

The internationalization of human rights was begun by the League of Nations after the World War I. The tragic experience of World War II led to the formation of United Nations in 1945, which reaffirmed their faith in human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (HR) on December 10, 1948 was undoubtedly a milestone in judicial and human history asserting one's right to be human. Following the historic event of 1948, the Geneva Assembly called upon all the member countries, to publicise the text of the Declaration and to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions without any distinction based on the political status of countries and territories. Another significant development occurred in 1968 at the International Conference on human rights held in Tehran, which stressed to ensure that "all means of education" should be used to stimulate interest in the problems of HR in the fast changing world. The UN General Assembly also stressed to take steps to



promote human rights culture. UNESCO has also played a very important role in promoting HR culture and education. The World Conference held at Vienna (Austria) stressed to include Human Rights, Humanitarian Law, Democracy and Rule of Law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-governmental settings. The unique world body of teachers and experts, WCCI, established in 1970 has cast a responsibility on educators to ensure that the education contributes to the promotion of equity, peace and the universal realization of human rights.³⁰ The United Nations Decade for the Human Rights Education was proclaimed in December 1994 by the General Assembly, spanning the period 1 January 1995 to 31 December 2004, which is aimed at the following:

- (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) The full development of the human personality and its inherent dignity;
- (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;
- (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society;
- (e) The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Human rights are promoted through three dimensions of education campaigns:

- (a) Knowledge: Provision of information about human rights and mechanisms for their protection;
- (b) Values, Beliefs and Attitudes: Promotion of a human rights culture through the development of values, beliefs and attitudes which uphold human rights;
- (c) Action: Encouragement to take action to defend human rights and prevent human rights abuses.

Conclusion

Human rights education means much more than learning about human rights which inter alia includes information about its history, documents and implementation and also understanding and embracing the principles of human equality and dignity and the commitment to respect and protect the rights of all the people. Education for human rights also includes the skill for advocacy and actions, such as analysing situations in human rights terms and strategizing appropriate responses to injustice. The human rights can be promoted and defended on an individual, collective and institutional level. The need of the day is to make human rights education (HRE) as a part of general, secular as well as moral education. HRE is imperative for the overall development of personality of the human beings in rights perspective. So, the human rights education should be made part of school, college and university educational curriculum.

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