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**"LOCAL GOVERNANCE -
RURAL AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA"**



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Sr. No.	Article Title	Author/s	Page No.
49.	Digitalisation and Decentralized Governance	I. Ramabrahmam Gowd Kiran Kumar	380
50.	A Successful story of Villages: Hivre bazaar	Shashikant G. Shirsat Sachin S. Deshmukh	388
Human Rights and Governance			
51.	Human Rights Education As A Tool For Empowerment Of Local Governance	Dr T.S.N.Sastry	393
52.	Good Governance through Human Rights Discourse	Dr. Vijay Oak	399
53.	Human Right Perspective of Good Governance in India	Miss. Rekha Pahuja	404
54.	Human Rights: Implementation Awaited Good Governance.	Adv. A. S. Jadhav	143
55.	Human Rights And Good Governance	Dr.P.Ashokkumar.	418
56.	Good Governance: A Ladder To Human Rights Justice	Asha D. Sherkhane	422
57.	Sustainable Development Through Practices Of Corporate Social Responsibility	S. S. Bhushanam	428
58.	Right To Good Governance: An Inclusive Governance	Muralikrishna Kanala	446
59.	Human Rights Governance Challenges In India	Ravi Parupalli	452
60.	Human Rights Governance In India	C.Prashanthi	456
61.	Good Governance & its Nexus with the Human Rights	P. M. Joshi Dr. P. D. Joshi	460

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

-Dr T.S.N.Sastry*

Abstract

The contemporary era of governance both domestic and international is linked with economic growth orientation with sustainable perspectives. To become a robust economy, have command, and respect internationally, a state requires an effective human rights philosophy, which nurtures value oriented citizenry. To achieve an all round development of the polity, in tune with its ancient philosophy, India need to integrate human rights Education in its local governance, to address the conflicting situations, social, economic, political, and cultural issues that afflict community development and the nation building. This paper makes a modest attempt to examine the conceptual perspectives of human rights education and its significance of integration in the local governance of India.

Key Words:

Local governance, Human Rights Education, Sustainable Development, Panchayati Raj, Value Oriented Society

Introduction

From ancient to modern times, Local Governance by participation of people themselves within the community is well depicted in India. After Independence, Gandhiji wanted India to be a 'Purna Swaraj' which means, the entire administration and its development in every field need to be enriched with the participation of people freely. Accordingly, he opined that people should be empowered from village level governance to have the power to resist any kind of autocratic decisions taken by the State.¹ Accordingly, the participation of the people at every level of decision-making in a polity not only strengthens the country in all aspects, but also enriches people to learn to live in peace and harmony to address their grievances, whatever they may be in a coherent perspective. To establish such an egalitarian state, the people of the country have to be imparted human rights education to have a sense of responsibility to control the authority and able to be self-sufficient power to tackle the problems of their own with indigenous solutions. The Local Governance is the appropriate body to prepare such

robust citizens and to impart human rights education as per the objectives of the UN and the constitution of India.

Human Rights Education

From the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, efforts were on to promote human rights education at various levels for the augmentation of human rights. Accordingly, the various treaties and conventions from UDHR gave a flip to human rights education, especially, after the clarion call of the World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna in 1993.² The World Conference considers human rights education, training and public information essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. In order to implement the agenda of the World Conference the UN declared the period 1995-2004 as the UN decade for Human Rights Education for the propagation of philosophical objects of human rights at every level. However, in 2005 the UN declared human rights education as a life long process and adopted various course of action, to propagate the values of human rights from elementary level to the highest administrative level of each country. Accordingly it appeals all states to give importance of the advocating of human rights education especially at the Local governance level as the base point for the strengthening and realisation of human rights by all.

Though there is no specific, exclusive definition is there for human rights education, basing on the various international legal instruments on human rights, human rights education can be defined as any learning, education, training, and information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting skills and moulding of attitudes directed to:

- (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;
- (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law;
- (e) The building and maintenance of peace;
- (f) The promotion of people-centred sustainable development and social justice.

Accordingly, human rights education firstly, helps individuals

to learn about human rights and mechanisms to protect from the violations. Secondly, it equips people with the skills to apply them in a practical manner in daily life. Thirdly, it develops the values amongst the various sections of the populace, which in turn promotes a matured behaviour to defend human rights and finally helps people to employ the legally guaranteed methods to take action guard and uphold human rights at all times.³

India and Local Governance

Ancient to modern times, Local Governance occupied a prominent place in the Indian society. All the scriptures and texts prescribed the sharing of governance and the role-played by Gramkutam, described as village panchayat in modern times. The Arthasastra of Kautilya expounded the various aspects of village and the civil and criminal jurisdiction exercised by them.⁴ The Constituent Assembly members to continue the system, through article 40 empowered the state governments to constitute village panchayats as basic units of self-government. Accordingly each state has constituted the village and urban bodies, which account for nearly 250,000 of the former bodies and 3700 urban bodies are functioning for easy administration and to strengthen the democracy from gross roots. In spite of their constitution, since independence, many states virtually neglected them and filled with party politics. In order to correct the situation and to empower the village panchayats, in 1993 through the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments emphasized the need for the empowerment of local governance, which is the arm of democracy.

The aim and object of these amendments is to make the local governance powerful, free and meaningful participation of people, equity, non-discrimination, accountability, enhance the dignity, life and liberty, and common collective framework for action by all the actors of the local bodies. Human Rights and Human Rights Education has also the same vision, and being internationally accepted with wide acclamation to achieve the concept of sustainable development, their integration with the local governance would certainly lead a long way in ushering the objectives of both the constitution and as well that of the jurisprudential norms of international law of human rights.

Integration of HRE into Local Governance

Human Rights Education mainly aims to promote the culture of

human rights that are guaranteed internationally, which aim to alleviate poverty, empowerment of all sections of people, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society and expanding various freedoms to empower people to lead a life in peace. This being the prime objective of human rights education, it can be broadly defined as education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and moulding of attitudes to prompt action directed at strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, tolerance, equality and peace, among individuals, within societies and among nations.

The UN in its decade plans during 1995-2004, attempted to integrate it at all levels of administrative systems of every country. Its main thrust of focus was integration of human rights education with the focal point on the promotion of human rights could be achieved only if it is made as a compulsory part of local governance. Since, human rights education promotes interdependence, foster respect for and appreciation of differences, opposes all kinds of discrimination, empowers communities, encourages effective participation of people to address the issues of the community, nation and international aspects, and shapes human personality for the realisation and full enjoyment of human rights, the better place for its integration is the local governance. The Human Rights Council through a resolution in 2013 requested the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee to prepare a strategy report on the role of local government in the promotion of human rights. Accordingly, the first phase of human rights education (2005-2009) advocates for the integration of it through primary and secondary levels of education.

The Right to Education Act, 2009 through a number of provisions highlights the significant role and control that need to be played by local governments both at the urban and rural provinces. Since the act amply empowers, the local governance in various ways and means in strengthening and impartation of education on a compulsory basis, the ideals of human rights could easily be achieved by imparting human rights education. The UNICEF has prepared simplified booklets like the ABC of human rights to teach in an easy and explicable perspective in the primary and secondary levels.

Apart from all the above, the day to day straight happenings of people takes place in the community level and have an easy access

address the issues of the people, integration of human rights education at local governance will yield a number of results such as:

- Prepare the men of the community as strong political leaders
- Inculcate value oriented education,
- Promotes tolerance, respect for the rights of others
- Affectively tackle cultural practices that afflict human rights
- Effectively engage the learners through a dialogue in evolving the ways and means of transforming human rights from the norm based perspective to realist perception in augmenting the socio, economic, politico-legal conditions
- Enrich people to tackle corruption and other problems that are afflicting the local, national problems in an easy and effective perspective.
- Promotes cooperative living and able to transform people to oppose discrimination on grounds of caste, race, sex, language, religion and the empowerment of weaker sections.
- Teaches poverty alleviation strategies, and inculcates to find out solutions to enrich to lead a right to development attitude.

Conclusion

The integration of human rights education into local governance helps people to discharge their duties than clamoring for rights, and in the longer run transform lucidly people across the nation-states not only to make human rights a reality in their enjoyment but also tires to bridge a number of differences and problems that are deep rooted in the contemporary era. The major task lies on all the administrative and legislative agencies is to integrate the norms of human rights education into local governance with a proper institutional mechanism for the impartation of human rights education. Mary Robinson, the former High Commissioner of Human Rights Commission of UN subtly linked the relationship between human rights and participatory governance in a gorgeous perspective. In the words of her, "the Human Rights instruments assert that these rights must be effectively enjoyed, whether a country is developing or developed, and that a participatory democracy, based on the rule of law, is the only system of government that can ensure the implementation of all rights."⁵

The propagation and integration of human rights education into local governance is the apt place than their integration at any other level

of governance. The words of the Chairperson of UDHR Committee Madam Eleanor Roosevelt amply testify the above of integration of human rights education into local governance.

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person, the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."⁶

India as a party to the International covenants on human rights and has nurtured the duty based concept in contrast to the Western philosophy of human rights, the Union and States on an urgent basis evolve policy perspectives with a robust mechanism to endorse the ideal and values of human rights education in true spirit in its local governance to make India that could be different from that of its counter parts.



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- ¹ M.K. Gandhi Village Swaraj (compiled by H.M Vas). 1-18. 1962. also available at <http://gandhiashramsevagaram.org/pdf-books/village-swaraj.pdf> last updated on 15.8.2015
- ² For the provisions of various texts dealing with human rights education. see UN: Human Rights Education and Human rights Treaties, Fact Sheet No.2 HR/UB/DECADE/1999
- ³ UN: World Programme for Human Rights Education (second Phase) 12-13, HR/PUB/99/3, 2012
- ⁴ For a detailed discussion on the role of village administration. see Kautilya: The Arthashastra. (Rangarajan L.N. ed). 335-339, 370, 386 et. al., Penguin publishers, New Delhi 1992
- ⁵ Robinson. Mary. 'What Rights Can Add to Good Development Practice' in Alston. Philip and Mary Robinson (eds). Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement, 27. Oxford University Press 2005
- ⁶ Eleanor Roosevelt. "In Our Hands" (1958 speech delivered on the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)