



**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
and  
**HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

**Editors**

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Education

Dr. M. Briget Mary

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

T.S.N. Sastry

*The Purpose of Education is to manifest the Perfection, which is already inherent in man -Swami Vivekananda*

There is no saying that matches the statement of Swami Vivekananda and applies to all branches of education, especially that of Human Rights Education. Etymologically speaking, the main aim and object of education is to bring forth what is already embedded in the human soul. Then Education has a pivotal role to play in not only developing the mental faculties of a man but also helps the society to lay a strong foundation for the development of a sustainable, comprehensive, integrated, social, moral, ethical, value based and caste and class less society. Further, it provides a sustainable, comprehensive and integrated ideology for the policy makers to develop

The Significance of Human Rights Education in the policy of a nation. It is an intricate and demanding task that requires moral and ethical values to be instilled in the young. This will in turn lead to a society that is oriented towards harmony and tranquility and lay the foundation for a just and equitable society. In the longer run it will lead to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

These objectives are more easily achieved with the help of human rights education. Human rights are universal values on which the Indian civilization rests. The values that are required for the human rights are applicable throughout the world without any deviation. The human rights and education could be achieved by instilling the values of human rights in the young. Hence, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, "education should develop the human personality and strengthen of respect for freedoms....." (art. 26.2). The United Nations human rights seriously and consistently in the international society with its diversity of race, sex and religion. The General Assembly of the United Nations has declared the period (1995-2000) as the International Decade of Human Rights Education and requested all countries to integrate human rights education in their national and international policies.



the polity of a nation. This means, education has an intricate and demanding role to play in awakening the moral and ethical values that are imbedded in every human being. This will in turn develop the civil society more towards harmony and try to unite the people of a country and lay the foundation for a true secular society wherein there would be no consideration for caste, sex and religion. In the longer run it will lead to build a conflict less polity.

These objectives and aims of education could be more easily achieved with the aid and help of human rights. Human rights are the unparalleled repository of human values on which the progress and advancement of human civilization rests. Further, having common values that are required for the human society all over the World, they are applicable throughout the globe universally without any deviation. This being the sole concern of human rights and education, the objectives of human rights could be achieved more easily through imparting the values of human rights in the curricula of education. Hence, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms....." (art.26.2 ). Taking the philosophy of human rights seriously and in order to establish an international society without having any discrimination on race, sex and religion, in the year 1994 the General Assembly of the United Nations through a resolution declared the period (1995-2004) as the Decade of Human Rights Education and requested the nation-states to take integrated policies in the education sector both at the international and national levels in propagating the rich

## IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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ideals of human rights in order to establish the concept of "One World" which is the sole object of international law. Taking these aspects into consideration an attempt is made in this paper to highlight the significance of Human Rights Education and its relevance in imparting it in the Indian context.

### SCOPE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Human Rights Education means, it is an education, which develops not only the knowledge, skills and values of human rights, but helps the people and policy makers of a society to comprehend the problems of that particular society. This being the main objective of human rights education, the responsibility lies on the actors of society to take the responsibility in disseminating the values of human rights in a comprehensive manner for the establishment of vibrant and sustainable economic standards.

In accordance with its clarion call to help the nation-states especially the developing and under developed states, the United Nations throughout the Decade of Human Rights Education came up with many strategies to be adopted at the international and national level by its member states. In tune with the call of the World body, there is no doubt that almost all the states have taken many steps to propagate the concerns of human rights. However, these concerns have not taken a concrete step yet to offer a model for human rights education. Many a times a majority of the world population including that of India are of the view that Human Rights Education is simply a means of advocacy and propagation through various forms, such as governmental and non

governmental organizations by programmes, seminars, conferences, occasional fact sheets or authorship. This type of propagation is a part of education, this method is not the best adopted to educate the populace. There is a need for a comprehensive model in a systematic manner to understand the nuances of the numerous Conventions, Declaration, Resolutions and other instruments by the international community. Such training will certainly help to a great extent the basic concerns of human rights in a global based society for which the world has entered the 21st centuries.

In order to propagate the concerns of human rights for several decades many scholars and researchers have seriously involved in evolving various models to address the complex nature of value systems and the philosophy of human rights in an effective manner to various sections of the population. Among the various models that have been developed, values, awareness, accountability and responsibility methods are popular in many western countries, that of USA.

Among these models, value-based education is significant wherein the values are to be imparted to transmit the basic human rights issues and to foster its integration into the society. Public awareness campaigns and other programmes in this category. By adopting this



governmental organizations by conducting mass based programmes, seminars, conferences and publishing occasional fact sheets or authoring a few books. Though, this type of propagation is a part of human rights education, this method is not the sole method that can be adopted to educate the populace of the globe. There is a need for a comprehensive model to train the people in a systematic manner to understand and appreciate the nuances of the numerous Conventions, Covenants, Declaration, Resolutions and other treaty texts adopted by the international community. In fact this systematic training will certainly help to a great extent to appreciate the basic concerns of human rights in establishing a value based society for which the world is clustering for centuries.

In order to propagate the concept of human rights for several decades many scholars around the globe were seriously involved in evolving various methods to impart the complex nature of value system encompassed in the philosophy of human rights in an easy and understandable manner to various sections of the people around the globe. Among the various models that have been developed, the values, awareness, accountability and transformational methods are popular in many western countries including that of USA.

Among these models, *values and awareness, model* is significant wherein the values of human rights could be imparted to transmit the basic knowledge of human rights issues and to foster its integration into public values. Public awareness campaigns and school curriculum fall in this category. By adopting this model, the aims and

objectives of the normative value of the social system can be easily realized. In order to make this model very attractive, the human rights content should be highlighted in a simple and understandable perspective e.g., the ideologies of human rights especially relating to child labour or maltreatment of women can be depicted through mass based programmes of street plays etc. At the same time, the core values of human rights philosophy needs to occupy the centre-stage of this type of educational propagation.

At the educational institutional level, different strategies need to be evolved to impart the significance of human rights education to the pupil right from their formative years. In order to impart such training, the various specialized agencies of the United Nations have developed study materials, which need to be taken into consideration. In this regard, the efforts of the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) are worth mentioning. In order to suit the needs of almost all the countries, the UNESCO has developed a number of technical training programmes and materials. Among them, the basic book of ABC of Human Rights developed by UNESCO is worth mentioning. In this book, the UNESCO had taken pains to simplify the entire philosophy of human rights in a simple question and answer methodology. This is the most useful tool to develop interest in the children while imparting the values enshrined in the human rights prism.

At the secondary level, students need to be imparted about the structure of the United Nations and its role in developing the human rights initiative. At the Collegiate

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level, the programmes need to be focused towards appreciation of the critical components of human rights by the students. At this stage, the curricula need to be oriented with exercises wherein the ability of the students should be able to recognize the various dimensions of human rights, and, their relationship to a given conflict or problem oriented situations. Further, at this stage the student should be trained to find out new norms or values or to test with the existing value system to what extent the philosophy of human rights could be gauged up.

At the University level, the students should be oriented to appreciate the technicalities of human rights at the international and national spheres. Apart from this they may be asked to prepare modules interlinking with various subjects in order to integrate the moral values enshrined in the documents of human rights. These aspects would certainly yield results in making the populace of a polity to work for ever lasting value based society wherein the ideals of human rights would bloom in to transform the concept of ancient Indian adage "*Vasudahiva Kutumbakm*", which means a borderless transnational society.

In order to adopt this model, the various organs of a State, especially that of the Government of a State should take the lead to impart training to teachers and supply the relevant materials and allocate proper funds without any inclination to one-up-man ship. At the same time, the state should also take care that the pedagogical structure should be framed in such a way, wherein the aspects of human rights need to be integrated as part of the existing syllabi without bothering the students by making it as one more



additional subject. Further, ideals of Human Rights can be imparted to the students from the kinder garden to higher secondary level through play way method. In this regard, other social actors such as, teachers and researches of higher educational institutions, human rights advocates, practitioners and inter governmental and non-governmental organizations need to be made partners in alliance to easily spread the ideology with newer techniques to the teachers and pupil at different levels. This type of integrated and comprehensive planning will certainly yield the desired results and also save a huge financial burden on the exchequer of the state.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India being a dharmic land from ancient times it has adopted the philosophy of human rights through the concept of *Dharma*. Taking into consideration its own fundamental value system and responding to the clarion call of the United Nations, the constitution framers adopted the philosophy of human rights as an integral part of the Constitution of India while shaping its polity as a Secular, Democratic, Republic. However, it took almost four decades for the various organs of the state, (The Executive, The Legislature and The Judiciary) in realizing the significance of these ideals to transform them into cent percent reality. It is no exaggeration that since the late 1980's the Judiciary has taken the lead role in responding to the international and constitutional obligations that the state in protecting and promoting the human rights of the people of the polity. The activist / judicial call and the international pressure finally led the state to take a good

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS INDIAN CONTEXT**

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number of steps to augment the philosophy of human rights education.

On the basis of the Action Plan on Education for Human Rights and Democracy adopted at the Montreal Congress in 1993 and the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action for propagation of human rights through human rights education, 1993, the University Grants Commission of India adopted a plan of Approach in the Ninth Plan period. Based on the guidelines and suggestions of the various committees, the UGC established the Centers of Human Rights and Duties Education in many Universities to cultivate the ideals and to promote and propagate human rights through education, which is the corner stone for the viable sustenance of a democracy.

Though the University Grants Commission has taken certain steps to impart the principle values of human rights, we have miles to go in realizing the dream of creating a conflict less society filled with potential individuals in upholding the moral and ethical values of human rights. Incorporating Human Rights Education at the University level neglecting the other levels of education is of no use. If the state wants to transform its future citizens as responsible citizens of the polity, human rights education needs to be imparted from the primary level as suggested earlier. A close examination of the text books of Primary, Secondary and even the Under graduate programmes clearly indicates the complete absence of the teaching of human rights except in a tiny proportion in civics books. Introducing the Study of Human Rights as a separate field of study at the Higher Education level certainly will not yield the expected results as expected



by the international community. The step motherly treatment of the State in the promotion of human rights from the grass roots level, clearly reflects the concern that the state has even in this twenty first century not taken serious concern in nurturing the values enshrined both in the documents of human rights and the constitution of India.

### Conclusion

As suggested earlier, the State without straining much either financially or academically can achieve the objectives of incorporating the ideals of human rights education either by revising the existing text books or adopting the simple practical techniques which could yield the results in no time. Well at the same time, it has a basic duty to impart i.e., the training to the teachers at all levels and make the subject compulsory from Primary to the Graduate level whatever may be the discipline that the students study, (i.e., whether it is Social Sciences, Languages and Humanities or Science or Technology). Such a wide propagation of human rights through the academic modules certainly will make the country a conflict free society and realize the cherished goals of human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

India being a party to many of the international documents, to realise the Sarvodaya concept announced by the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi and on the basis of the Indian adage "*sarvamanava Saubrathathava*", the State and the various actors should give a serious thought to impart human rights education at the earliest in order to establish a tenacious democracy. The dissemination of proper information, both theoretical and

practical will play an important role in the development and protection of human rights in our society without any kind of delay. The State should integrate an educational module for all individuals of this great nation. This will be an answer to the call given by the Constitution of Human Rights.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the need for Human Rights Education in Colleges.
2. What should be the objectives of Human Rights Education?

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practical will play an important role both in the promotion and protection of human rights and in establishing a society without any kind of discrimination. The State should integrate an educational policy to enable the future individuals of this great nation to bloom. Above all these will be an answer to the call given by the world conference of Human Rights.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Discuss the need for Human Rights Education in Colleges.
2. What should be the objectives, scope and content of Human Rights Education?

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