



Establishing a Human Rights Oriented Society through Reorienting Higher Education

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Abstract

Human rights are essentially the rights to be enjoyed by of the people in a civil society. Human rights and Human rights violations are matters of discussions even before the emergence of contemporary political order. A state, that negates its citizen's basic human rights cannot exist or prosper for long. There are so many instances in history for the outbreak of revolution due to the denial of human rights and persecution by the state authority. Germination of struggles and revolutions owes to the violation of human rights. Individual and group initiatives and actions are essential for the protection of human rights. For the observance and respect for human rights such collective movements play a vital role now. Teaching the principles of human rights at all strata of higher education can make commendable contribution for the purpose. The Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR) also proclaims that: "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...". Lessons of human rights must be made an integral part of academic curriculum which is a pre-requisite for the effective realization of human rights.

Keywords: Human Rights, Higher Education, Society.

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Introduction

Initially the philosophy of fundamental freedom meant just political and civil rights of an individual. Only in later time it was realized that only by guaranteeing socio- economic and cultural rights, political and civil rights can be protected. The state authority must act as the protector of these rights. The right to self-determination, right to development and protection for disadvantaged groups also recognized as human rights then.

Teaching of the Human Rights in educational institutions of higher learning such as universities and technology institutes will have positive impacts in the observance of human rights in society.

Further focus will be on higher education institutions. As such institutions are dealing with matured citizens it will be easy to infiltrate the meaning of human rights. Students at this stage are capable to understand the history of evolution of human rights and the deliberations on it by various world organisations and institutions like United Nations. The students at this stage might have information regarding the ongoing struggle for the protection of human rights all over the world and can have discussions aiming to explore the in

depth meaning of socio-economic and political rights. Being the training ground of professionals such as bureaucrats, legal professionals, health care providers, scientists, teachers, journalists, community leaders and so on the proposition to include human rights as part of curriculum may influence the mindset of them and benefits at large scale to attain the ultimate goal. An enlightened society can be evolved by making the prospective leaders and those holding positions of responsibilities in the society more aware about human rights. Making the educated one equipped with lessons of human rights will help to prevent any abuse to human rights in the society.

Human Rights became a theme of discussion. Why?

Human rights issues catching attention due to

- The state authorities, social activists and legal experts focusing on international covenants on human rights.
- Evolution of movements for gender equality, movements for protection of subaltern classes like minorities and indigenous people, movements for the protection of rights of children, international movements for refugee rights etc...
- Formation and active reactions by non - governmental organisations against the violation of human rights by the state and its arms like police and military

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Human Rights Protection

For the protection of human rights a new culture of respecting human rights need to be created. For that

- It is needed to create awareness among people about these rights and what are the duties for respecting other's rights.
- It is needed to empower people to fight for the protection and preservation of these rights.
- It is needed to shed some hereditary prejudices and practices, attitudes and beliefs which are derogatory to other's dignity.
- It is needed to restructure the social and governmental institutions and establishments to make it accountable and more effective. Education is not only an exercise in assimilating, creating and disseminating knowledge but also a powerful means of bringing about attitudinal changes.

Protection of Human Rights through Education

Human rights are to ensure everyone socio-economic and political justice and make sure equal opportunities for growth and development each individual. It is pathetic to state that even after decades of planned development India couldn't create an environment of observing human rights. This failure is mainly due to non-recognition of education as an instrument of social attitudinal changes of the people. Positive changes are observed recently in this regard.

After the observation *decade of Human Rights Education* by United Nations much focus is there on it. The Human Rights Education as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes the efforts to build a universal culture of human rights through imparting of knowledge and the molding of attitudes. Such educational policy needs to be directed towards:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.
- Developing the human personality and human dignity.
- Fostering understanding, tolerance and gender equity among various national, socio-cultural and linguistic groups.
- Furthering UN activities for maintaining peace.

Only through the creation of human rights culture we can stop human rights violations. The objectives of UN in its human rights educational efforts are to teach the "common language of humanity" to all people. It strives to make humankind fluent in the vocabulary of human rights and to empower people from all walks of life-students, farmers, police, soldiers, teachers, leaders etc.- to apply that vocabulary in their daily conduct.

Human Rights : The role of Higher Education Curricula of Higher Education

Though almost all countries of Europe and North America and some Latin American countries have

introduced human rights teaching at various levels in higher education, very little has been done in India. There are structural barriers for the introduction of new curricula or the revision 'of the old ones. It has been initiated and approved by the academic council and other appropriate bodies of the universities concerned. Preparation of broad guidelines in consultation with the 'official' representatives of various Higher education institutions is required. Wide spread awareness of this is needed, and that National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken initiative, on priority basis, to promote teaching human rights at higher levels consequent to this NHRC pressure, so it seems, the Ministry and national bodies such as UGC, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) have become more 'active' in planning for teaching Human Rights. Several universities have introduced courses on 'International Human Rights Law'. A few universities have also introduced "Post-Graduate Diploma in Human Rights ". But the question is that "Have we made the necessary preparatory work to move ahead on the journey, what would be not only long but continuous also?"

Origin of the Concept of Human Rights in Higher Education

There is a prejudice that human rights is a western concept imposed by western powers and while introducing it in India priority must be changed.

The origin of the concept of human rights could be traced not from any specific period or specific region or culture, but from the dawn of civilization-when human beings first started living in groups.

Our tradition has been to offer respect for all human beings irrespective of one's religion, caste, color, race or creed etc. Vedic philosophy, Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism, Islam, Sufism, Sikhism etc, all lay emphasis on universal brotherhood. India was perhaps the first country in the world where freedoms of religion, freedom of expansion accompanied by right to dissent were part of our way of life.

Human rights education should focus on India's contribution alone; this would amount to chauvinism, something which goes against the very concept of human rights, but teachers / students should know that concern for human rights is not something "foreign" but rooted in India's centuries old history, culture and tradition.

Human Rights and contemporary Higher Education

Our priorities, in the present situation should be different: we are even not in a position to ensure basic necessities of life to a lion share of our population. Hence the priority should be to the planned efforts to the eradication of poverty and hunger and other social anomalies. Our social institutional structure and age old hierarchical social order in rural India is an impediment. Privileged positions and comforts and luxuries of life are enjoyed by a micro section of the population. Lion share of us do not have enough in their livelihood. A meager

percentage of the students only are getting opportunity to go for higher and professional or technical education, others do not.

Teaching of various disciplines in natural sciences should emphasize that scientific research and its application should be so directed as not to posit a threat to human dignity and human rights. Engineers, technocrats, doctors and nurses, acquire during their training and professional education, the necessary understanding of human right dimensions involved in the discharge of their duties. Nonetheless, if education is to provide the intellectual basis for understanding and resolving important contemporary social problems, education at all levels will have to deal with teaching about human rights.

Role of Teachers

Human rights education implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge.

As a key role player, the teacher concerned bears a commendable responsibility in exercising their discretion what to teach and how to impart human rights education. They have to take into account the discipline and professional training students are getting equipped with, and also have to keep in mind the social realities and needs and aspirations of the people concerned.

Here we have to recognize the role of training that our teachers are getting. Efficient and well-structured training is a pre-requisite. In the teacher's or instructor's training human rights must be included. Lack of necessary motivation, the lack of necessary informative training and materials for carrying it out will register a failure to attain the goal. In this context, the various training programmes for teachers such as Orientation programmes, Refresher courses, periodical workshops and seminars could play an important purposeful role.

Curricula and the examination system, which, of course remains the exclusive responsibility of the appropriate bodies of higher educational institutions which should keep in mind that teacher concerned is given wide discretion in picking up specific themes and methods of teaching, as well as evaluation. Therefore, an attempt is made here to gather some observations in this direction, in a general way.

Human Rights as a discipline in Higher Education

In social science and humanities, for instance, introducing a separate compulsory course on human rights should not create much problem. Indeed, in some disciplines such as political science, economics, sociology, law etc., human rights dimensions could conveniently be added to the existing courses in addition to a separate course.

Inclusion of human rights in sciences, including

medical sciences, as a separate course or adding in existing courses is very much desirable. In the first instance, the role of science needs to be spelled out. This would involve examples from agriculture, health or medicine, communications, transport, meteorology etc. Further, attention to those aspects where the application of science and technology lead to violation of human rights, such as radiation hazards, abuse of drugs, misuse of electronics and computers resulting in violation of the rights of privacy, environmental pollution and ecological imbalance, use of human subjects of experimentation, especially in the fields of medicine and psychology including artificial insemination, manipulation of human embryos, transplantation of organs, pre-natal sex diagnosis etc.

Even though we recognize the universality of human rights and the idea of universal brotherhood, teaching of human rights must be planned after realizing the socio-cultural settings, as well as to national and local realities. It is true that the principles underlying human rights are universal, but teaching would be merely reduced to theoretical exercise if the approach is not based on real problems. Teaching procedures and methods need to be adopted specifically to contemporary and live problems and to socio-economic realities of the offering country.

Conclusion

An action oriented research is required to frame a strategy to overcome the above discussed issues. As all we know, evils like bonded labour and child labour are in practice even after the legislations banning all that. What needed is an in-depth research based on fieldwork to bring forth the entire set of problems, both economic and social, which are keeping the continuance of, as in the cases of bonded labour and child labour.

Of late, it is gratifying to note that various universities have undertaken research work on human rights related issues and problems. At Jawaharlal Nehru University lot of dissertations on themes relating to human rights have been completed leading to the award of Ph.D or M.Phil. Degrees. The subject covered ranges from India and International covenants on Human Rights, to child labour, rights of the disabled persons, bonded labour in specific areas and so on. Other universities such as Delhi University, Bombay University, Guwahati University, Banaras Hindu University, Pune University, Aligarh Muslim University, Indira Gandhi National Open University and our state universities have encouraged scholars to undertake research work on Human Rights.

Networking of documentations by establishing information centres with research facility may be established to provide an access to the academia to information at national, regional or state levels. Such units or centres should serve as depository of texts of international instruments, declarations, covenants adopted by different organizations and agencies of United Nations and other international organizations.

These centres should collect and disseminate information on national and international human rights legislations, as well as information relating to syllabic materials and instructional guides for all levels of education. The availability of material towards setting of priorities for effective human rights research can be, thus, ensured. Curricula in various subjects have to be restructured, reading material has to be prepared, programmes for co-curricular, extra-curricular activities for promotion of human rights education have to be introduced.

Only by series of orientation programmes for the academia we can convert our teachers into human right oriented teachers. Only with such motivated dedicated teacher-society we will be able to make our centres of higher learning into human rights education centres and there by establish a human rights oriented society.

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