

## **Background paper on Human Rights Education**

(SEOs Meeting on 24.9.2007 at 12<sup>th</sup> APF Meeting)

### **Introduction :-**

The importance of human rights education hardly requires any over emphasis. It has a crucial role in preventing human rights violations from occurring.

The United Nations proclaimed that human rights education is “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through imparting knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes”. These efforts are designed to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, facilitate the full development of human personality, sense of dignity, promote understanding, respect, gender equality and friendship to enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, and further activities for maintenance of peace.

Human rights education, training and public information are, therefore, necessary and essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among the communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. Through the learning of human rights as a way of life, fundamental change could be brought about to eradicate poverty, ignorance, prejudices, and discrimination based on sex, caste, religion, and disability and other status amongst the people.

Human Rights Education serves as means of understanding and embracing principles of human equality, dignity and commitment to respect and protect the rights of all. Once the people grasp human rights concept, they begin to look for their realization in their own lives, examining their communities, families and personal experiences through the human rights lens.

Dissemination of knowledge of human rights and duties must therefore, aim at bringing about attitudinal changes in human behaviour. It is commonly acknowledged that students are the dynamic and progressive component of citizenry. When properly trained and guided they can become instruments for ensuring social

justice and development. Similarly, teachers have a crucial role in developing awareness among the students to translate human rights into social and political realities.

**Context :-**

The Commission has been deeply conscious of the inherent difficulties involved in creating an "awareness of the safeguards available" for the protection of human rights in a country of more than one billion people where 35% of the population remains trapped in illiteracy as per 2001 Census and vast numbers of our compatriots live below the poverty level. Indeed, in this endeavour as in others, the Commission could not but observe that a clear linkage existed between the creation of a society that was just, in economic, social and cultural terms, and one in which a culture of human rights could take root, be sustained and flourish.

The Commission is of the view that the base for the promotion and protection of human rights inevitably requires, in great measure, a challenge to entrenched attitudes that are inimical to the proper respect of such rights. In civilizational terms, this means the shedding and denouncing of accretions and aberrations that, over time, have wounded and fractured our society, leaving some more equal than others, in grievous violation of human rights norms and of acceptable standards of equity and justice. It is necessary to recognize deep societal injustices inflicted on Dalits and Scheduled Tribes, or the patriarchal biases that, too often, have victimized the girl child and women in our country. These are only too well known. The Commission has been dealing with these prejudices head-on and has been encouraging others to do so.

**Role of NHRC :-**

One of the most far-reaching responsibilities entrusted to the Commission under its Statute is that contained in Section 12(h) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, which 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".

**Major interventions by NHRC on Human Rights Education in last 13 years :-**

- The Commission's efforts to mobilize the education system on behalf of human rights began to bear result in the course of 1994-95 with the active support of the Human Resource Development Ministry. In 1994-95, the Commission had asked that the NCERT to undertake a review of existing text-books with a view to eliminating from them those passages that were inimical to human rights or that distorted them.
- The NCERT prepared a Source Book on Human Rights in English, Hindi and Urdu as a guide for teachers and other academics, a project in which the Commission fully collaborated, making specific suggestions as to its contents.
- In 1995-96 a national-level training programme on "Human Rights and National Values for Teacher Educators" was held. 40 participants, drawn from different parts of the country, attended the week-long programme.
- The Chairperson of the Commission wrote to all Vice-Chancellors asking them to see how best they could include human rights in the curriculum at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels and promote research, seminars and publications on human rights.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) had appointed a Committee on human rights education under Chairmanship of Justice S.M. Sikri which prepared a valuable report, titled "Blueprint for the Promotion of Human Rights in India at All Levels" in 1985. As no effective action had been taken on that report, the Commission got in touch with the UGC. As a result, the Law Panel of the UGC has prepared up-dated proposals for including human rights in LL.B and LL.M courses and other subject-panels of the UGC.

- At present there are 35 Universities, Colleges and Institutions that offers Human Rights Courses. At the instance of the Commission, the Indira Gandhi National Open University launched programme in human rights using the Distance Education methodology.
- Urged the UGC to earmark a certain number of fellowships for research on clearly identified human rights subjects.
- In a major effort to establish a centre of excellence for human rights education, the Commission has set up the National Institute of Human Rights (NIHR) at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. A Chair on Human Rights was also created with the assistance of this Commission.
- The Commission played a catalytic role in the drawing up of a National Action Plan by the Government of India as a part of the observance of the U.N. Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). The Commission offered its support, advice and guided its efforts in this direction. That Action Plan groups activities under two broad categories:
  - strategies for raising mass awareness and
  - strategies for promoting social empowerment through attitudinal change and the sensitizing of specific target groups, such as the police, security forces, students, judicial officers and others through education and training.
- The Commission had prepared, in partnership with Karnataka Women's Information and Resource Centre (KWIRC), a set of 10 dossiers on Human Rights Education for Beginners. It covers Rights of the Child, Rights of Disabled, Rights of the Dalits, Reproductive Rights, Human Rights and Environment, Land and Housing Rights, The Rights of Home based Workers, Gandhian Struggles for Land Rights, Rights of the Fish Workers and the Right to Information.
- The Commission has been bringing out an Annual Journal to stimulate academic thinking on the Human Rights.

- In January 2003, the Commission brought out a Handbook entitled "Discrimination based on sex, caste, disability and religion" with a view, primarily, to sensitize teachers.
- A handbook on "Human Rights Education for Beginners" was published on 10 December 2005.
- The Commission in collaboration with the NALSAR University, Hyderabad brought out a series of booklets titled "Human Rights" on the following themes
  - (i) Human Rights and the Constitution of India
  - (ii) International Covenants on Human Rights
  - (iii) Sexual harassment of women at the work place
  - (iv) Manual Scavenging
  - (v) HIV/AIDS
  - (vi) Bonded Labour
  - (vii) Child Labour
  - (viii) Rights of the Disabled.
- The Commission took a conscious decision to create a Training Division in September 2004 to further human rights promotion. Broad based training strategies were evolved to create a discernible impact on different sections of the society. Training programmes/workshops and seminars were organized for civil servants, police officers, prison officials, judicial officers and NGOs.
- In addition, the Commission supported Seminars, Workshops, Research studies, publications and public information activities through media to support Human Rights education.

## **Recent Interventions by NHRC**

### **Human Rights Education at School level**

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 programme 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.

In this regard, the Commission made an attempt recently to collect the information concerning the status of Human Rights Education in schools in various states in the country. The data/information received from various states were analyzed. It was observed from the responses received that the Human Rights Education in most of the states from class VI to class XII, where mainly the national curriculum is followed, constitute a part of the social studies. At the same time it was also observed that the way the human rights education is included in the curriculum at the school, secondary and higher secondary level, is on the lines of providing a set of structured information to the children rather than giving them an opportunity to get sensitized towards the issue of human rights per se. Unless otherwise the children who are going to be the future of the nation are made to realize the human rights issues in particular, from the point of view of an understanding of mutual respect towards rights of others, brotherhood, peaceful co-existence besides providing them an understanding of the dynamics of psychological, social and economic development, the purpose of the human rights education cannot be fulfilled.

It was also observed that the element of human rights education in the existing national curriculum may not serve the purpose. The impracticability in the

existing national curriculum arises from the fact that the element of human rights involved therein is just to know it theoretically and simply write an answer to the question on the human rights issues in the examination. Thus, there is a wide gap between human rights education and its implications in day-to-day life.

In order to bridge it, there is a need to devise a mechanism to not only to change the mindset of the children but also to imbibe human rights values and traditions and help children to develop positive attitude towards the human rights per se. To nurture the value and culture of human rights in the child during the formative years there is a serious need to 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 National Human Rights Commission constituted a Task Force to look at the prevailing human rights education scenario at school level in the country based on the information collected in the Commission and to suggest as to how the human rights education could be made more effective at the school level.

The Task Force consisted of academics from Universities, National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Principals of Schools and representatives of civil society.

Based on extensive deliberations, the Task Force suggested that human rights education could be made effective at school level in a sustainable manner provided in the first instance, trained manpower is created in order to disseminate human rights

education, besides teaching human rights at this level of education. Thus, it was considered important that we have an appropriate model of human rights and such model need to be incorporated in teachers training programmes besides its inclusion in other professional degree programmes leading to Bachelors Degree and Masters Degree in Education and others.

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 and different levels i.e. primary, secondary and higher secondary.

The curriculum development exercise of the Task Force has focused on the imparters of the education front. The Task force formulated a Module on Human Rights Education for Teaching Professionals Imparting Education in Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary Levels. The module has been carefully drafted keeping in view the existing human rights education and also recent advancements in human rights.

The exercise of developing a human rights curriculum for primary, secondary and higher secondary is being conducted by the National Council of Education Research and Training separately and it is hoped that very soon their efforts would

begin impacting our country's education system at lower levels. The Central Board of Secondary Education has evolved a syllabus for human rights education at school education level, which will come into force from 2008.

### **University Education :**

The value of a nation can be assessed on the criteria of quality and character of its citizens. In this endeavor the role of education plays a very crucial role. This is an undisputed fact. The Commission has made an effort in the past in order to ensure that the education at all levels incorporates human rights issues and build a culture of respect towards Human Rights in the society. This is one way by which an effort can be made in creating a sustainable development of a nation.

In the year 1999, the Commission suggested to the University Grants Commission to evolve the curriculum on human rights education and to introduce the same in the universities and colleges across the country. In pursuance, the University Grants Commission developed the model curriculum on Human Rights & Duties Education in the year 2001, which was subsequently introduced in the universities and colleges. However, it was noted that over 35 universities and colleges across the country have introduced human rights education programmes leading to Degree, Diploma and Certificate Courses. Through the analysis of the data collected in this regard, it was realized that there were various stages of incorporating human rights education in the higher education institutions.

One of the key issues, which has emerged in the analysis, is that the human rights education programme could not make a dent in the education system largely

owing to the fact that the programme is not marketable and as such hardly there is any taker of students/scholars who pursue human rights education. Besides this, human rights education has been seen in a more compartmentalized manner. As a result this programme has become more of law centric rather than being focused and taught and implemented by such departments which are not directly thought of being linked with it. Further, by and large, if we look at the human rights education from generic point of view this subject needs to be taught at all levels of education irrespective of discipline of study. In order to facilitate human rights awareness and to nurture Human Rights values in the young minds, it is essential that the human rights education be made a part and parcel of the education programme right from primary to higher education.

While considering the issue of the human rights education, the Commission decided to look at it not only from the class room teaching perspective but towards a more practicable education so as to produce a generation of students which is sensitized on human rights issues.

For this purpose, the Commission has received rich and comprehensive inputs from the members of the Task Force, eminent academics, legal experts and civil society for the formulation of a model curriculum.

In addition, this model curriculum has been an effort to bridge the gaps which have emerged in the area of human rights education over the last five to six years as well as the gaps which have been noticed in the human rights curriculum being followed in the universities and colleges in the country at the movement. Thus the

uniformity in human rights education curriculum would tone up the human rights education as well as accelerate the process of human rights education with a fine tuning in the university and college education across the country.

The Commission's recommendations on human rights education leads to foundation courses on human rights at under-graduate across all disciplines, certificate course on human rights, under-graduate course on human rights, post graduate foundation course on human rights, post-graduate diploma course on human rights, post-graduate degree course on human rights, post graduate degree optional papers and research degree in human rights education (Identification of the New Areas for Research in the Field of Human Rights).

The above recommendations, which were based on the National Consultation organized by the Commission in July, 2007, have been sent to the Chairperson, University Grants Commission with a request to incorporate them in the UGC syllabus and also extend necessary support in the implementation of these recommendations. In addition, the Commission sent them to Vice Chancellors of over 150 universities across the country and requested them to take appropriate action for introduction of all or select courses on human rights as suggested by the Commission. In addition, they have been sent to the Chairperson, National Council for Teacher Education, National Council for Educational Research and Training, Central Board of Secondary Education, All India Council for Technical Education, Medical Council of India, Indian Nursing Council with a request to take action for introduction of appropriate modules on human rights education for teacher educators.

The Commission has been receiving responses from many universities conveying their acceptance to take appropriate action for introducing human rights education (copy attached).

Responses to the Recommendations of NHRC on Human Rights  
Education (for Teaching Professionals Imparting  
Education at Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary,  
University and College Levels).

Sl. No.	Universities	Comments
1.	V M Salgaocar College of Law, Goa	College will use the recommendations to frame human rights syllabus of the College and University.
2.	Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala	The University would like to have HR introduced in the University Curriculum.
3.	North-Eastern Hill University, NEHU Campus, Meghalaya	The University would be happy to consider the implementation of both the recommendations. The training of school teachers could perhaps be undertaken by one of our Centres that participate in extension activities. For the course at the College and University levels, this would need to be placed at the Academic Council for deliberation and guidance.
4	The Maharaja sayajirao University Baroda, Vadodara	Acknowledged the receipt of the recommendations.
5	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi	School of International studies has been asked to look into the matter and will give the recommendations as to how to go about it.
6	Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.	The appropriate action is being taken to introduce the Module on HRE duly

		recommended by NHRC in the Faculty of Education, which imparts teachers training degrees.
7	Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow	The Department of Human Rights under Law Faculty is functioning in our University since 1997. They are planning to send opinions on the recommendations made by NHRC.
8	Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, Rajasthan	The module would certainly provide valuable inputs in further strengthening the course structure on Human Rights and Values Education under the UGC Scheme.
9	Human Resources Department, Government of Jharkand	Human Rights Education related chapters are incorporated in the School curriculum of Government schools. The Government uses NCERT Books in Government schools. HR is not taught as a separate subject but chapters are incorporated in books, for instance, in social science (civics).
10	Netaji Subash Open University, Kolkata	Acknowledged the receipt of the copy of NHRC recommendations. It will definitely be very helpful in implementing course on HRE. Further, informed that the University is already conducting a certificate course on HR.
11	Dr. Harisingh Gour University, Sagar, MP	The University will take appropriate action for introducing HRE. Appreciated the concern of NHRC and for taking the lead role in introducing HRE in the country.