

SCHOOLING FOR JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS IN INDIA -A MODEL

A Study Report

A Study Sponsored by
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Schooling for Justice and Rights
Human Rights Education in Schools in India – A Model

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Justice Shivaraj V. Patil



Former Judge
Supreme Court of India

Foreword

I am happy and delighted to write foreword to the book “Schooling for Justice and Rights” Human Rights Education in Indian Schools building a model”. This is a book based on the experiences of Human Rights Education Programme of people’s watch, Madurai, Tamil Nadu (India). Human Rights and fundamental freedoms are the focal points in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed on 10th of December, 1948. This was a remarkable day in the modern history of mankind. This declaration was not either a sudden or miraculous event. It was the effect of cumulative and continuing movement of human conscience. This declaration represents the collective wisdom of the world community to work together for a world without injustice, indignity and ignorance; a world without cruelty and hunger.

Respect for human rights is the greatest inspiration for integration of human kind, both internally and internationally. These are the days of modernization, liberalization, privatization and globalization. But, all these must have element of humanization. Humanize the globe so that human rights violations are less so as to make this world a place worth living with human dignity. “All human rights for all” should not merely remain as declaration on paper but it must be the spirit of living in daily life. Respect for human rights lies in treating others as you expect others to treat you. This is really a better way to serve the cause and purpose of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 declares – “All human being are born free and equal in rights and dignity.” If this declaration is to be translated into action all over, creating awareness about the human

rights is essential. I am of the strong view that this can be done through human rights education at all levels i.e. right through Primary to University education. The Supreme Court of India in *Mohini, J. Vs. State of Karnataka* (AIR 1902 SC 1858) held that the right to education is concomitant to fundamental rights enshrined in Part III of the Constitution. Further in *J.P. Unnikrishnan Vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* (AIR 1993 SC 2178) interpreting article 21 of the Constitution, Supreme Court declared that every child under the age of 14 years has a right of basic education. I am of the opinion that the Human rights education in appropriate measure depending on the level of education should form part of curriculum, in the centers of learning at all levels. Unless one is made aware of human rights, he or she cannot be sensitive to human rights issue. A student informed of human rights will be in a position to assert and respect human rights and shall be able to contribute for the better promotion and protection of human rights. Wherever he goes and what ever profession/work he takes up he shall help in preventing violation of human rights if not totally but substantially. Hence Human rights education is vital, necessary, relevant, critical and important to develop Human Rights culture. Knowing the Human rights education programme of people's watch through Institute of Human Rights, Madurai, providing Human rights education at school levels in different parts of the country, in 13 States in India, I acknowledge their valuable contribution and congratulate them.

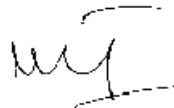
Dr. V. Vasanthi Devi, Chairperson, Institute of Human Rights Education in her introduction refers to a chance question thrown by a group of teachers at a People's Watch at Tamil Nadu, a human rights organization 10 years ago – "what can school teachers do to uphold human rights? Can human rights be brought into the Campus? Can the activists be educators? If the purpose of education is sensitise, and humanize and not merely to inform, then, who can be better educators than activists? These questions are ably and justifiably answered in this book.

The book in addition to the thoughtful and meaningful introduction deals with 8 aspects. When I read them I had deep impact and impression on me. I am sure whoever reads the book will certainly have the positive impact to appreciate and support human rights education in Indian Schools.

This book also reflects the tremendous contribution of People's Watch made through the Institute of Human Rights Education. Impressed by work done by Sri. Henry Tiphagne, Executive Director of People's Watch and Dr. Vasanthi Devi, Chairperson, Institute of Human Rights Education with the co-operation of all the concerned I heartily congratulate them. Every one of the topic included in the Book shows in-depth study of the issues, deep concern, commitment and respect for Human Rights culture. Consistent with the goal of the Institute of Human Rights Education (IHRE) of building up of Human Rights culture in society through education and training, tremendous work is done in reaching 3186 schools, 4345 teachers and 2,96,797 students in the field of Human Rights Education spread over in 13 States after crossing difficulties, encounters and challenges. With the valuable experience gained through these years, the IHRE, I am confident will be able to achieve much more substantially and meaningfully. This work is an example as to how the committed and well meaning NGO like Pelple's Watch can do on its own. If only State Governments and Central Government and other stake holders, share and support the vision and mission of the IHRE in its endure to take forward Human Rights Education in Indian Schools, it will be a great success in establishing and promoting Human Rights culture all over.

Article 26(2), Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.". Education about Human Rights is a empowering process. In the topic "Pedagogical Process" it is rightly said that Human Rights Education needs a radical Pedagogy and Human Rights Education cannot be imparted within the four walls of the class room. It has to be learnt out in the world in the midst of people particularly among victims of injustice and rights violations.

This book, in my view is of great quality and utility. I am confident that this book will benefit large number of people and stake holders greatly. My best wishes for the success of Human Rights education in Indian Schools.



Justice Shivaraj V. Patil
Former Judge
Supreme Court of India

Acknowledgement

My first mention under acknowledgement would have to be Ms. Elena Ippoliti, of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights who graciously participated in the launch of the Institute of Human Rights Education's National Programme for Human Rights Education in Schools in India on November 26, 2008, at Madurai (Tamilnadu) which was instrumental in her getting us the grant for this book and for having gone through the drafts of the book patiently several times and for her line by line comments. We would like to strongly recognize her as the spirit behind the initiative that led to this book.

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I am personally grateful to Mr. Koshy Mathew, Editing Consultant, who has provided us the final draft of this book and actively involved

himself in the whole process. Without his timely support, the report would not have taken this shape.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who were part of the human rights education program but left it earlier than this report having taken shape - namely, Mr. Vanarajan, Mr. Devaneyan, Mr. Paul Devanesan, Ms. Chitra, Ms. Thamizhazhagi, Mr. Sundararajan, Ms. Kulandai Theresa for their work in coordinating the program in the schools covered in this report at different points of time. It is their untiring work that has led to many of the positive contents that this report wrests upon. I recognize the contributions made by Mr. Bernat, State Coordinator of Tamil Nadu for organizing the field work, going through the manuscript and for selecting the case studies and photos. I would also like due credit to all the current staff members of Institute of Human Rights Education in coordinating the field work of this study that led to this book, namely, Mr. Soosai, Mr. Shiyam Sundar, Mr. Anandaramakrishnan and Ms Booma.

I need to also make a very special mention of and acknowledge all the children, teachers, Head of Schools, our own Honorary District Coordinators, other volunteers and resource persons who were part of this program from 1997 and those who participated in this study, without whom, we would never have got this experience and the report deserves our strong appreciation. Full credit goes to all those children and teachers who have been responsible for being agents of change in their own milieu - schools, families and communities - because of their engaging with human rights education in their schools, which were shared by them during the launch of National Program for HRE and which paved the way for such a study.

I am thankful to all the officials of the Directorate of Adi Dravidar Weldare (ADW) and Department of ADW of the Government of Tamilnadu, all Dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church where this program was also undertaken, the state officials of the Catholic Religious of India (CRI), other managements and heads of schools

where we had implemented human rights education - for their permission, cooperation and support for the successful implementation of the program.

I express my gratitude from the depth of my heart to all the Members of the Tamilnadu State Advisory Committee for HRE in schools for their constant and continuous support, guidance and accompaniment that has enabled us to expand so much within and outside Tamil Nadu. I also wish to gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by all those resource team members and honorary Coordinators who were part of the program at various stages for their cooperation and constant encouragement and support over the years.

IHRE Core Committee members who had gone through this report and gave their comments deserve our highest appreciation. I thank Ms. Veena Shankar, Director (Finance & Administration) and her team and Mr. M. Louis, Director – Programs & HRD for their fullest support and cooperation in the successful completion of this book. I strongly convey my sincere appreciations to Ms. Sabitha for translating many parts of the book, giving suggestions and going through the manuscript.

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HENRI TIPHAGNE

Executive Director

People's Watch

Introduction

“To break a million bondage.”

“What can school teachers do to uphold human rights? Can human rights be brought into the campus?” It was a chance question thrown by a group of teachers at People’s Watch, Tamil Nadu, a Human Rights organisation, involved in protection of human rights in the deep south of India. That was ten years ago. The challenge was intriguing and inviting. Can an organization of activists involved in the daily struggles of victims, for survival, justice, dignity, dare to enter the rarified realms of education? Can activists be educators? If the purpose of education is to sensitise and humanize, and not merely to inform, then, who can be better educators than activists?

The bane of today’s education is its alienation from the world around. Education, instead of being a force for liberation, often turns into an instrument of oppression, of manipulation and thought control in the crafty hands of oppressors. That is why Ivan Illyich called for a ‘De-schooling Society’ and Paulo Freire tried to evolve a ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’. The antidote has to be sought in an alternate education, a humanising, liberating education. If so, how do we begin to pull down the walls of alienation? How do we facilitate the community and the campus getting seamlessly woven together into a fabric of beauty?

And so began a quest ten years ago, a quest to build a programme of human rights education. The Institute of Human Rights Education was born. While the vision and the inspiration came from the field, education was a world of specialists. A different kind of educators, however, had to be found, educators aware of the class-caste-patriarchal-imperialist character of education and were eager to demystify it. The task was

entrusted to them. A whole array of issues unfolded and were collectively negotiated, with educationists and activists playing equal role in this labour of love.

Though the Institute had initially launched the Human Rights Education (HRE) programme independently, with no reference to the UN Decade of Human Rights Education, soon it opted to come under the global programme. The Institute viewed the UN Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004) as an opportunity for concerted and collective action to promote the concept of human rights through education interventions. At the close of the Decade of Human Rights Education, the United Nations has come up with the World Program for Human Rights Education with a special focus on Primary and Secondary schools, for 2005–2009. The World Program considers that human rights education is essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. The Institute of Human Rights Education is implementing HRE in consonance with the objectives of the World Programme. The banner of the UN provides the international context, legitimacy and official acceptance to our program.

What is the curriculum for a human rights education program? We live in a world of a thousand oppressions. Millions of our people, children, women, dalits, tribals, the poor, the slum dwellers and many others are subjected to injustice, right denial, exploitation, oppression, discrimination and violence. The vision of human rights education is to change such a brutal, heartless world. The faith of human rights education is that the task of changing this world can only begin in the classroom, where the destiny of the nation and of the world is forged. The seeds of a better world, of love, friendship, compassion, beauty, creativity, freedom, equality, democracy should be sown and nurtured in the minds of children. We have to take up the monumental task of placing before the young student the world of raw reality and empower her to understand, analyse, challenge and finally to transform this world.

All education ought to be Human Rights Education in one-way or the other. Education should, directly or indirectly, serve the interest of furthering human rights, not of select or privileged sections, but of every human being, irrespective of her nationality, class, caste, gender,

race, ethnicity, religion, or mental or physical disability. The purpose of all education is to sensitise, to humanize, to take humanity to higher levels of knowledge, awareness, freedom and social responsibility.

However, education as defined above, is a distant dream. The education system today divides, discriminates, fragments. It justifies existing inequities and creates new ones. It alienates the student from the world around, from the society that gave birth to her and nurtured her. It prevents the students from relating to and understanding the denials, deprivations, the struggles of large sections of society and thereby also denies wholesome knowledge.

Human Rights Education is a different education, an alternate, radical, education. It is sensitizing, humanizing, bondage-breaking, liberating education. It celebrates humanity. It cultivates critical insights in students, equips them with tools to question, to analyse, to challenge and ultimately to change systems of injustice and oppression. It helps each child to realize her ultimate potential, not as a self-centred, aggressive individual, but as a member of a society, of a democratic nation. It is the fruition of the dreams of reformers, radicals, nation builders for a long time.

The task of curriculum framing was taken up with such daunting thoughts and the humility that work with people had given us over time. A curriculum was prepared after many consultations. It is an evolving curriculum, not one frozen in time and space. The basics alone are kept constant, while freedom is given to teachers and curriculum committees everywhere to innovate and create a contextual content, taking the classroom as closely as possible to the life of the student and the immediate community. Today, when we have moved into twelve states, the need for modifying the content to the requirements of the immense diversity of India is acutely felt.

While the specificity of human rights violations were kept in mind, the universality of rights provided the larger framework and terms of reference. Teachers and students had to be made aware of the truth that "humanity is our home." Violation of rights anywhere is unacceptable, immediately relevant, to be challenged as if it took place in our backyard and solidarity with the victim to be instinctively extended.

Next was the question of appropriate pedagogy, which posed

challenges equal to, if not greater than what was encountered in framing the curriculum and syllabus. The radical education needs a radical pedagogy. The classroom in India, as it exists today, is ill-suited to transact a humanizing education. Classroom relations are power relations, with the teacher wielding absolute authority over the students. The curriculum, evaluation methods, a fiercely competitive culture, and concepts of discipline militate against nurturing a human rights and democratic culture. Human rights education needs to be a child-centred education, respecting the child's role as constructor of knowledge rather than treating her as a passive recipient of information. It meant that "human rights in education" must be upheld as much as "human rights through education."

We have built a vast network across the immensity of India. We work in twelve states, from Tripura in North-East and West Bengal in the East to Gujarat in the West, from Rajasthan and Bihar in the North to Kerala and Tamilnadu in the South. We have encountered challenges, bewildering in their variety, throwing questions at us for which we have no answers. We have taken in our little hands a handful of seeds of immense potency and broadcast them across a sub-continent. We have moved with the faith that wherever these seeds fall they will germinate and in the chemistry of mingling with wildly varied soil, a thousand flowers will bloom.

The last ten years have brought rewards beyond our wildest hopes, exciting growth, expansion across the vast and varied landscape of India, warm welcome to our program from unexpected quarters, from insensitive bureaucracy and indifferent political leadership and more than anything else, appreciation of teachers and eager, enthusiastic response of students. We have also had a much smaller share of disappointments and set-backs, which however, pale into nothing compared to the rich rewards we have reaped. It has been an intensely learning experience through a dynamic, dialectical process, not all of which was pre-planned.

We are asked again and again, are you not spreading yourself too thin; is there not a big transmission loss? We acknowledge there is transmission loss. The passion of Madurai, (our headquarters) drawn from daily encounters with brutal violations and daily struggles on the side of victims cannot be easily transmitted to distant Rajasthan and does suffer loss in the process. But we have also seen enhancements,

in dedication, in our repertoire, in exhilarating new pedagogical methods. The main reason for it is that everywhere we move, we initiate a collective process, that rolls on, carving its own trajectory. To cite a few such instances, to the human rights stories we initially identified in Tamilnadu, Orissa has added new ones on Land Rights, Cultural Rights and Language Rights, as these are the inalienable rights the tribal communities, who constitute 28% of the state population, are being brutally denied. We initially developed the modules in the language of each state. However, in many states, large proportions of the people speak dialects, significantly different from the state language. The curriculum development committee in Orissa is planning to bring out the modules in the major tribal dialects. In Bihar the proposal is from the inception to adopt three major languages of the state as medium of learning for HRE. Tripura, too, plans to have two major languages, one a tribal language, as learning medium. Our programme is for students in classes VI – VIII and is pitched at that level. In a school in West Bengal the HRE teachers felt bad that the senior students, who would be graduating out of the school soon are denied the benefit of the rich and empowering HRE programme. So, on their own initiative, they are offering HRE to students up to class XII, with suitable adaptations.

In the mighty and magnificent task what are the major challenges we have encountered?

- Education in the formal sector is in the realm of the state. Institute of Human Rights Education is a civil society organization that is making a foray into the realm of the state. It is sometimes seen as breaching the boundary between state and civil society and our credentials to be educators are questioned and viewed with suspicion. The critique, however, softens and dies out as our Institute is headed by educationists, who have held high academic positions and our State Advisory Committees have reputed academicians and persons of national eminence as members in each state.
- State power is controlled by dominant sections in all societies. These sections are the beneficiaries of the exploitative, unequal regimes that prevail. Human Rights Education critiques, challenges and hopes ultimately to overthrow such regimes. That is why Tolstoy once said, “ True education is liberating. No

government in its senses will allow it.” How realistic is it to expect governments to extend support to a radical education? Here the contradictions between the philosophy and practice of a modern democratic state comes to our rescue. The Indian constitution is a profoundly human document and the state is expected to uphold the democratic mandate of the constitution. The rhetoric of freedom and equality prevails in the public domain and sweeps the horrors of a class-caste society under the carpet. And so Human Rights Education is accepted, perhaps, as belonging to the realm of rhetoric and will be permitted in the classroom till its radical content becomes manifest and threatens.

- Still some state govts are uncomfortable with our content. They question the need for talking to students about inequities and violations of human rights. They are worried about the radical implications of human rights education and seek to dilute it. They want us to sanitise our content, “ keep caste out, keep untouchability out”. What do we do at such moments, when we are asked to compromise? We have attempted persuasion and when it failed we chose to abandon the program in the particular state rather than compromise and corrupt the soul of human rights education.
- The age of globalization and reforms in which we are living is a dehumanizing time. The education system is designed for the needs of hegemonic corporate capital. Our children are indoctrinated with the ideology of competition, of fierce, ruthless, man-against-man competition. Children are programmed and launched into the world for global conquest. The individual fiercely alone, slogging every minute to excel is the marketed model today. And HRE deals with the beauty and might of collectivity and solidarity building. Some schools ask us ‘where is the time for HRE? Every minute is needed to coach our students to excel in exams.’ How do we change this mindset? How do we start a process of detoxification, to flush out the poison?
- And then, do we talk about state violence, which is a good part of human rights violations? The vast majority of students in our HRE program in all the states are from sections of the citizenry that bears the brunt of state violence. They are witness to the brutalisation of the state, when the police swoop down on their

poverty stricken homes and drag away the father or mother, foisting false cases. The children in tribal schools have suffered the trauma of dispossession and displacement, when their entire communities were flushed out like rats from their ancestral lands, by the guardians of law in unholy alliance with forest mafias. Should we speak about these violations in HRE classes? If we don't, are we not guilty of hypocrisy? If we do, can we hope to have the continued patronage of the state?

Such are the challenges and questions we face. We have no answers to all the questions. We move on in the hope that the millions of teachers and students of HRE will find the answers, someday.

The Impact

Today we look back and try to take stock. What have we done and what have we not done? Have we touched hearts and minds and transformed them? Did the seeds we broadcast, in love and hope, germinate? Where did they germinate? Which soil proved fertile for germination? Which soil provided nourishment and nurtured them to luxuriant growth? What fruits did they bear? Which soil killed them with its toxic animosity and indifference?

Here is an impact study, commissioned by those concerned and committed to take human rights education forward. The study, as it was commenced, threw up questions of immense relevance. How do we measure something so ethereal as transformation of the soul? Has the world of knowledge devised yardsticks to measure internalization of human values, subtle behavioral changes, the questions and doubts that rise in young minds, the tiny ripples caused in the world around by such questions, the imperceptible change in the brutish environment?

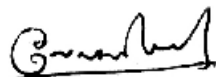
Perhaps we cannot measure them; but we can feel them, we can sense the difference, we can experience the stirrings. We have hundreds of stories of impact that initially trickled in, a few at a time. Today, there are hordes of them, each an anecdote of hope, from every corner of India, where we have taken our message. These stories of transformation of HRE teachers and students and the social impact of the HRE program have touched the hearts of all those who have come to know of them. These are stories of questions asked that were never before asked, silences broken, voices raised, a little hand of help extended, adults shamed, alcoholics transformed, a silently suffering mother surprised by her little

son confronting the drunken father, daughters of fiercely patriarchic communities daring to demand education.

A 12-year-old student of HRE in an area notorious for female infanticide, intercedes when the life of a female infant is to be snuffed out, quotes his HRE lesson, runs from pillar to post to save the life and ultimately succeeds. Where young girls are married at the age of 13 or 14, a little girl's marriage is stopped by the collective intervention of her classmates. In a place of rampant child labour, a ten year old boy being physically abused in a road-side shop is saved by the intervention of HRE teachers, keeping vigil through the night and bringing the abuser to law. Seventy five children of migrant construction workers, languishing without schooling, get a new school, when HRE students from a nearby school take up their cause with authorities.

The evidence we are marshalling is, till now, mainly anecdotal, but each anecdote is a stone thrown into the cesspool of centuries of oppression and indignity. Each of them strengthens our mission, gives us a new hope, our faith assumes evangelical passion. Meanwhile some more schools are wanting to join us, a few more states are beckoning to us. We move on.

Human rights education is a compact for creating a humane world. We have a world to challenge and change and a world to win and build. Human Rights Education is part of the struggle for human rights, "an eternal struggle, in which a final victory can never be won. But to tire in that struggle would mean the ruin of society"(Einstein).



V.Vasanthi Devi

Chairperson

Institute of Human Rights Education