

Human Rights, Culture and Education

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HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION takes place whenever rights are articulated in relation to issues. In expressing the need to be free from situations of poverty and injustice, the discussion of national or international human rights standards may come in to support such aspiration. In discussing how to address issues, relevant rights may be cited as part of the means to resolve the issues.

The demand to be free from abuse, discrimination, deprivation of basic needs and other forms of suffering has been expressed in artistic and cultural ways through the ages. This demand has been the subject of plays, poems, songs, art works and other forms of expression. More or less, these expressions touch on protecting human dignity as well as human rights.

Cultural expressions can have powerful influence on members of society. Those who create such cultural expressions can influence people. They have the opportunity to do human rights promotion.

Culture as a Force in Society

“Lit-Fests” are now being staged every year in different parts of India and attract thousands of people. Each festival has “interesting sessions held around contemporary topics, with live musical performances “ (Jaipur Literature Festival), “not only features writers but also facilitates workshops for prospective writers, music and dance performances and other entertaining activities” (Apeejay Kolkata Literature Festival), “includes conversations with authors, reading, panel discussion, workshop and book launches as well as cultural programmes” (Hyderabad Literary Festival); “lively debates on emerging trends and issues, new forms of literature and writing, old authors and epics” (Tata Literature Live), “showcases a perfect combination of the cultural diversity in the capital of India and is a development of the same on the intellect and academic front on a single stage” (Delhi Literature Festival); “tries to bring about multiplicity of languages like Hindi, Urdu, Awadhi and English on a common stage” (Lucknow Literature Festival); “features the

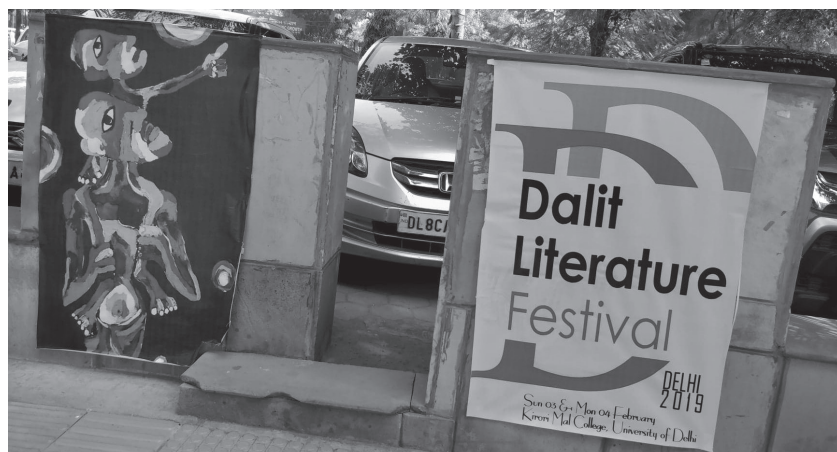
opulence of literature, cinema, and music all over the country, in addition to having captivating discussions and debates” (Times Lit Fest); “talking about books, book writing and literature amidst beautiful ambience of Kasauli is a marvel on its own” (Khushwant Singh Literature Festival Kasauli).¹

But these “Lit-Fests” have been criticized for failing to take up the Dalit discrimination issue, which remains a major problem in the country. Several groups² involved in the movement against the discrimination of the Dalit initiated a counter-festival, the first Dalit Literature Festival (3-4 February, 2019 at Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi). The organizers justified this counter-festival as a means to restrain the control of literature, culture and art by certain groups in society. They explain:³

We have been observing that literature is being appropriated by various forces that are governed by caste and capitalist formations and a trend has been created of organising **Literature-Culture Fest** in regional languages at the State level in different parts of the country. These groups are deeply entrenched into a caste and Capital entitlement and oppression. Their tendency for appropriation are driven by the understanding that Literature, culture, and Art have continued to play a significant role in making man-community-society more creative, alert, sensitive and thought-oriented. Therefore, these groups want to establish control over the domain of literature, culture and art.

The Dalit Literature Festival is designed to stress the collective responsibility of ensuring that culture would support the Dalit call for social change. The Dalit Literature Festival’s concept note explains:⁴

Amidst such a situation, it is the collective responsibility of all those who believe in the idea of Social Justice and an Egalitarian Society that we protect values of justice and equality embodied by our literature-culture-art. Also, it is our responsibility to bring together various cultural and artistic minds who believe in social change and justice, to strengthen the people oriented and change centric positive stream of Dalit. Only this positive and change centric vision can bring about momentum towards the foundation of a better society and community in [the] future.



Festival Poster.

Mahtab Alam

The Dalit Literature Festival is conceived to be the “occasion to witness the social realities through artistic expressions by various groups.” It is meant to “initiate a parallel change-oriented literary discourse in which Dalits, tribals, denotified tribes, women, minorities and *pasmanda* [Dalit Indian Muslim] communities and the literature [festival] will establish a solid platform.”⁵ It is planned as a “platform [that] would establish a dialogue so that the pains and problems of Dalit communities can be brought to light, furthermore the cultural traditions and vibrancy of Dalit literature and art can be demonstrated.”⁶

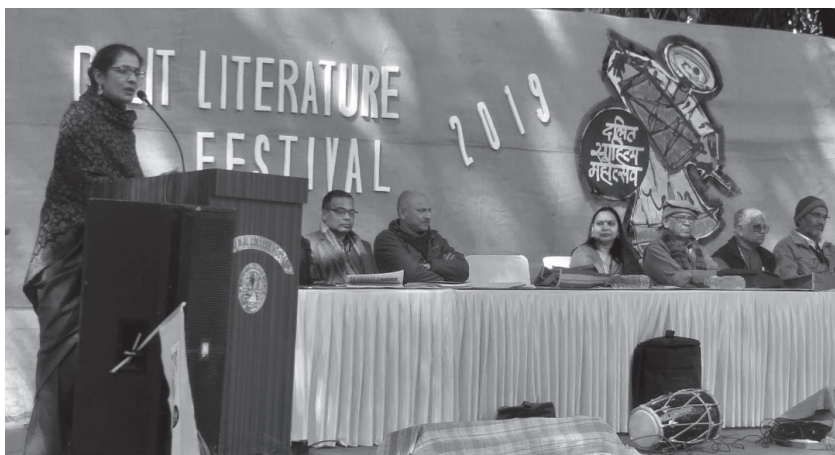
A report on the festival highlights the issues:⁷

Over the two days, participants and speakers emphasised the need for unity amongst the writers of marginalised communities and identities across religions, gender and regions. Speaking at a joint session on the identity question in Dalit literature and minority discourse, writer and literary critic Chauth Ram Yadav argued, “Pichhda-Pichhda aik samaan, Hindu ho ya Musalman” (Marginalised and Dalits among different religions are treated in the same manner). “We need to focus on the social location of the writers, not their religious location,” he said.

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Poet-activist Balli Singh Cheema, while speaking on the issue of social justice and people’s movements, said language is

important to connect with the masses. “We have to write in the language and style which is understood by a large number of people. Otherwise the very purpose of our efforts will be de-



Inaugural Session of the first Dalit Literature Festival.



Poet Balli Singh Cheema speaking at the Dalit Literature Festival.

Mahtab Alam

feated,” he said. He appealed to writers to use simple and local language.

The Dalit Literature Festival also “showcased the literary and cultural talents” of members of Dalits and marginalized groups:⁸

“More than highlighting the atrocities and injustices faced by Dalits, this festival is to celebrate the cultural talents and heritage we have,” said Sanjeev Kumar, one of the organisers.



Mandeep Alam

Members of Rashtriya Ambedkar Mission Exam Baspa Prachar Mandal at the Dalit Literature Festival.

Both the "Literature-Culture Fest" and the reaction to it (Dalit Literature Festival) celebrate the rich cultures of India as expressed in literature and other artistic expressions. But the Dalit Literature Festival advocates a cause to eliminate discrimination against marginalized peoples in India by celebrating their (marginalized peoples') rich cultures. The Dalit Literature Festival has a clear aim of using literature and art as means to address a persistent human rights issue.

Artistic expressions can mean many forms including the traditional and modern artistic expressions. They have been used as tools in influencing opinions and changing behavior.

The use of rap, currently used by young people worldwide, is one such modern artistic expression.

Dalit Rights: Rap and Hip Hop

Sumeet Samoos, "a 24-year-old rap artiste from Koraput, Odisha who has lived and survived the caste discrimination in the country.... tries to bring forward the voices of the masses which have always been unheard of in the caste-based society."⁹

Sumeet has strong words to criticize the current system that has not stemmed the continuing tide of discrimination against those who belong to the lowest caste known as Dalits. To be emancipated from “a Brahminical society,” he uses rap and Hip Hop. In the song “Ladai Seekh Le,” Sumeet explains that the song is a “critique of the caste as a system and rap is the medium for that.”¹⁰ He writes rap in Hindi and English.

The work of Sumeet is seen as a¹¹

tool to directly connect with the younger generation as well as understand and act against the stigma and harassment associated in the public as well as private lives of varied communities and caste hierarchies. A new perspective is brought into action using the popular culture of rap music in contemporary times.

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Samos’ works stands out not merely because it voices the underprivileged, but also because unlike the popular rap culture of Bollywood and Punjabi rap, it is not based on sexism. In the popular rap catered to the majority population of the urban youth, the feminine body is presented as a mere sex object not only visually but also in lyrics. It would not be wrong to say that leading rap artistes of the Hindi Film Industry have degraded the form and feminine identity to sheer slander.

His song titled “Hard Truth”¹²

aims directly to the so-called Dalit sympathizers who exploit stories and narratives of the unprivileged sections of society. This attitude of the upper caste makes Samos believe in the existing power structure of the society held in the tight grips of Brahmanism.

In his English rap “All You Know is Five Words,” Sumeet criticizes people including those in the academe, mass media, private sector and politics for not really knowing the real issues and the proper solution to them:¹³

All you know is five words,
Dalit, Merit, Caste, Ambedkar, Reservation.

Bondage in the Caste nations, Land, Resources, Education,

Looting for the thousand years,
 Still blaming Reservations.¹⁴
 Provisions in the Constitution,
 Given by Baba Saheb
 For the Oppressed Representation.
 This isn't your charity,
 No Poverty alleviation. Academics, Media, Bureaucracy, Justice
 system.
 Private sector, Politics, Cinema and journalism.
 Bunch of few Top castes are in Overpopulation.

With rap and hip hop as his medium, Sumeet aims to raise critical awareness of the age-old Dalit discrimination among the young people in India. At the same time, he is making a “counter-rap” against the mainstream rap in order to express issues that adversely affect people and society.

Engaging Traditional Culture

Cultural traditions regarding music, play, poem recitation and other forms of entertainment can be employed to raise awareness. But people who use them have to reshape cultural traditions into forms that suit the current context.

Traditional songs may have new lyrics that reflect new ideas and situations. Children in the Philippines use the traditional *balagtasan* (public debate on an issue using poetry) in the modern sense because they speak of current concerns. *Balagtasan* requires wit, quick thinking, and memorizing as well as capacity to do fast-paced prose composition. A Filipino author (Virgilio S. Almario) describes the traditional *balagtasan*:¹⁵

The protagonists in the BALAGTASAN are still required to be skillful in memorizing long verses with rhyme and meter and reciting with flair (as they say, “con todo forma”) in public.

Balagtasan had nationalist as well as cultural heritage agenda during the time when the Philippines was under the American colonial rule. Almario explains:¹⁶

As a nationalist movement, BALAGTASISMO embodies the ideals of the Philippine Revolution against Spain and continu-

ously aims to assert Philippine independence from American Occupation. But its political outlook encourages BALAGTASISMO to adopt a very conservative cultural platform. It has preoccupied itself with the preservation of Filipino heritage -- old values, folklore, customs and traditions -- as a means to strengthen the moral fiber of the people against the modern but corrupting American influences.

Thus the first decades of the 20th century under American rule were a time for intense political campaigning for Philippine independence and passionate efforts to revive cultural memories. This period helped legitimize the *kundiman* [songs] and *barong tagalog* [men's shirt] among other symbols of Filipino nationhood. It nourished the kind of rural nostalgia evoked in Fernando Amorsolo's paintings, in the designs of Isabelo Tampingco, and in the so-called "tropical art deco" buildings of Juan Nakpil. In literature, it was manifested in the cult-like worship of Francisco Balagtas. The genius of Balagtas was recalled in a manner similar to Dante as the father of the new Italian language or Shakespeare as the precursor of modern literature in English. The phenomenon suggested to me the name BALAGTASISMO. It also indicates why the poetic form invented during the period was named the BALAGTASAN.

At present, rap is considered a modern form of *balagtasan* in the Philippines. It is a form of entertainment of young Filipinos – either in small street gatherings in the community or in “rap battle” or floptop held in bigger spaces. One report states:¹⁷

While some of the older generations may not understand or accept battle rap as a legitimate form of expression and entertainment, there is some progression being seen, with some academics describing it as modern-day ‘balagtasan’ which is a formal Filipino form of debate that some educators consider an art form [and] part of the Philippines['] 21st century native literature.

The 2017 Filipino movie “Respeto”¹⁸ provides an example of the use of rap in relaying a message to society. Treb Monteras II, the film Director, explains why rap is the focus of the movie:¹⁹

“Nowadays, with people facing violence and poverty, Filipino youth have also found an escape through rap music. Because it’s

free. All you need is to gather your ka-tropa [group mates], your voice, and an exchange of rhymes and you're enjoying rap."

Yet he has a message to convey:²⁰



"But this movie is more than just a hip-hop movie," he added. "It's a reminder that we should have respect for ourselves, each other, and more importantly for human rights. It's also about martial law. I hope this becomes a reminder that we shouldn't repeat what has happened in the past."

This explains the title of the movie "Respeto," which means respect.

The movie features rap battle, reminiscent of *balagtasan*²¹:

The concept of rap battles isn't as foreign to Filipinos as one might initially think. Filipinos have been slinging saucy rhymes at each other

since April 6, 1924, when a group of writers decided to commemorate the birthday of renowned poet Francisco Balagtas through debates done in verse. Modern FlipTop has rappers; Balagtasan has Mambabalagtas poets. FlipTop has an emcee as a moderator between opposing sides; Balagtasan has the Lakandiwa/Lakambini. In certain fiestas Balagtasan debates have been replaced by rap battles, not only because of the popularity of hip hop in the Philippines, but also because it is something that has roots in our culture.

The use of rap as modern *balagtasan* illustrates the capacity of culture to change and adapt to new situations. Such culture change does not destroy the basic idea of the culture; instead, the traditional form of the culture is made relevant to the current context and given new life.



Reviving Traditional Socio-Cultural Activities

The video documentary “Drumming out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan” (2003)²² tells the story of young people from Okinawa who migrated to Osaka city in the 1970s looking for work.

As young migrant workers, they faced discrimination, prejudice and poor working conditions. Those who came before them, after the end of the second World War, also suffered discrimination.²³

In 1975, these young Okinawans established the Kansai Okinawan Young People's Social Club in Osaka city and adopted three slogans:²⁴

Young migrant workers stick together!

Let us protect our right to a livelihood!

Let us protect and teach people about Okinawa's natural beauty and culture.

The club, popularly known as *Gajimaru no Kai* (Banyan Association),²⁵

represents a place of healing. The [Okinawans] can always go back to Okinawa. But if they don't, the Banyan Association is a piece of Okinawa for them in Japan, where they can breathe and re-balance themselves.

The "Banyan Association planned a range of activities to help the Okinawans in Osaka and the surrounding area to retain their pride and self-respect. *Eisa* – an Okinawan tradition of drumming and dancing – became the Association's main activity."

They realized that in the presence of the mainland Japanese they were "a bit inhibited, not able to express what is on their mind." To them, this is a situation of discrimination.

This is explained by one of the leaders of the group, Yoshinori Tamaki:

"The point is if we can express ourselves openly then people who see us don't feel uncomfortable"

Kaoru Kinjo, a founding member, emphasized the importance of "cultural activity for minority individuals to fight discrimination":²⁶

The situation of not being able to behave freely, in other words, of feeling discrimination, means if there is someone around with a prejudice against you, you can't find the energy to fight back. By getting together, people felt they could stand their ground better. They could of course, get together without

anything connected to Okinawa. But it's the same. They don't go out to work united in a group. And, after spending time together everyone goes off to their separate lives. Then, if they face problems individually, they each need the energy to stick up for themselves. For that, restoring their sense of identity by expressing their Okinawan culture is a vital support, and they react by feeling bold and confident. Gradually they stop feeling so sensitive, and people stop interfering with them. Maybe they're easier to understand, or both sides are better able to accept themselves. So picnic, hiking, volleyball and other sports ... sports have nothing to do with culture, so all this can't help them generate the energy to stand up for themselves. But joining in the *eisa*, or doing drama, playing the *sanshin*, doing karate, doing Okinawan classical dance ... all done in small groups, these things are a much greater support. Some people become truer to what's inside themselves, and others reinvent themselves.

Earlier, the other older Okinawans living in Osaka did not want to display in public their sentiment. As Kazufumi Nakamura explains:

18 years earlier from 2000, Okinawa Kenjinkai, a club for Okinawans, in Taisho ward, "wasn't happy about us displaying Okinawan culture outdoors in public where everyone could see"... "they didn't agree with our showing Okinawan culture" in public place, *umui* (emotions and desires), workplace discrimination, court battles, those kinds of things."

Kinjo explains what happened when the people began to feel comfortable displaying in public their own culture:

They'd start to show who they really were for the first time ... In that sense they became themselves once more, there was a whole generation glad to have come to the Banyan Association.

Eisa is a²⁷

form of dance performed in Okinawa during the summer *bon* festival, when the spirit of the deceased are believed to return temporarily to the world of the living. The *bon* is held for three days, July 13 through July 15, as part of the lunar calendar according to which Okinawan rituals and festivities continue to be

observed. The spirits are welcomed (*unke*, July 13), entertained with food, drink, music, and dance, then sent off (*ukui*, July 15) until their next visit.

Gajimaru no Kai introduced *eisa* to the Japanese mainland through its Osaka activities.²⁸ The Banyan Association's performances inspired Okinawans living in other parts of Japan (Hyogo, Kyoto, Tokyo, Aichi and Hiroshima prefectures) to also organize their own *eisa* groups. These *eisa* groups join the annual Eisa Festival in Osaka to "acknowledge the pioneering work of the Banyan Association and to celebrate the Okinawan culture."

Eisa became the medium that helped these young Okinawan residents come together and gain the confidence to express themselves in public. As a result, they overcame the silence that they endured in the presence of the mainland Japanese in Osaka. They were able to face the discrimination that their silence had tolerated.

"Drumming out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan" (2003) shows how these young migrant workers from Okinawa and second-generation Okinawans in going "through the process of performing *eisa*, act on the derogatory images in mainstream culture, and at the same time transform themselves into individuals more resistant to the adversity created by such images."²⁹

This video documentary exemplifies the practical step that groups suffering from human rights violations or abuse can take to express themselves and allow other people the space to recognize them and their rights. Mere display of the cultural traditions (such as *Eisa*) of a minority group should not offend people. But such cultural display invites those who do not belong to the group to see them not as people deserving discrimination and exploitation but as people who deserve respect.

Transforming Culture

While the use of traditional culture is important in introducing and asserting identity, it is subject to change over time when used in another context. The aspects of culture that endanger people's welfare, security and rights in the current context are also subject to change.

Culture change is necessary in order to address social problems. Education is one medium that can facilitate culture (and also social) change. But how can this be done?

Ibu Nyai Eva, a teacher in a *pesantren* (traditional Islamic school),³⁰ in Indonesia, believes that “in the strong culture that favors child marriage, this cultural problem needs to be countered with a strategy that does not oppose it frontally.” She provides one answer in relation to traditional child marriage practice:³¹

“If parents come and want to take their child away to get married, I will ask what the reason is. Insofar as possible, I stretch it out and say, “Wait, not now, exams are coming, or wait, let her finish a cycle of reading the Qur’an.” If they accept this, that means there’s a postponement [of the marriage], even if it’s only temporary. So then after the harvest season, they come again, ask again, and I negotiate again. If we reach a deadlock, I let the child go, but with a promise that after the traditional wedding, she will be brought back to the *pondok* (*pesantren*). I also offer a scholarship for her husband, because often the husband is also underage. Child marriage is a cultural issue, so we have to be wise in negotiating with the parents, with people who think child marriage is not a problem; that’s how we deal tactfully with the culture.

We’re often tempted to make regulations. Of course that is important, but we also need to understand how the local tradition interprets child marriage. Here, child marriage is sometimes just like playing [with] marriage, because the motivation is to collect on a social debt, or to raise social status, or to strengthen social solidarity. Without an understanding of the culture, rules to postpone child marriage will simply be rules written on paper. To negotiate with the culture, we have to work within the framework of that culture, even while maintaining a critical stance against it. Myself, I use the framework of justice in Islam, Islam as *rahmatatan lil alamin*, a blessing for all the world, not just for males but also for females, and for those who are kept weak by the culture itself”.

The authors of the report where this quote was taken commented that this experience is not widespread. They wrote:³²

But how many educational institutions actually care and insist on ensuring equal access for girls who are married to continue their schooling? Most of the other stories are about adolescent girls who entered the world of marriage while still children, and parents who simply gave in to custom or pressure.

This experience points to the fact that the work towards culture change is not easy since those involved might not be able to stand societal pressure against change, and institutions that have capacity to push for change might not be willing to do so even if such effort is for the benefit of the affected people.

At the same time, it is also not a matter of simply confronting culture with supposedly better ideas (such as modern or international ideas) but of engaging it in ways that both respect the culture and initiate change from within it. Again, such engagement would not be easy.

Additionally, this experience shows the need to be cautious about over-dependence on enforcement of law to force culture change. Unless laws are enforced in ways that consider how culture operates and is maintained, laws will remain “rules written on paper,” rather than rules upheld by people based on their recognition of the need for culture change. The consistent criticism of governments around the world during the human rights sessions of the United Nations regarding the inability to enforce laws in effecting change (i.e., protection and realization of human rights) may be partly attributed to their failure to consider the cultural contexts and processes of people.

How far can we dive into the depths of culture to facilitate change of mindset and behavior is a question for everyone in the field of human rights education.

Facilitating Change in Mindset: “Laskar Pelangi”

Belitong island is the setting of a movie that tells the story of students in a small school. The island is described as

one of Indonesia’s richest islands. It’s an island overflowing with tin. This tempted other nations to take over...[the mining industry in the island]. And even after the country gained its independence, the people of Belitong were still unable to enjoy their own natural wealth due to bureaucratic walls. Walls which blocked off opportunities and hope. But those walls could never break our spirit especially the spirit of a poor boy from the coast ...

The building of the small school is not in good shape and people warn against bringing children there:



The school and the students (Copyright by Miles Films, 2008).

That school's roof is falling apart.

Where are you going? You're going to put children in that collapsing school?

Children from poor families are expected to end up working in the mining company. Education is not seen as a need for them. On the first day of school, the parents bringing the children to the small school were taunted:

What's the school for! He'll end up being a coolie anyways.

The school named SD Muhammadiyah Gantong needed ten students to continue operating, as ordered by the local Board of Education. It is a school for children from poor families.

The first student to enroll is the barefooted son of a poor fisher living far away along the coast. He is the first-born and only son with three younger girl siblings. He no longer has a mother, and his father is raising them alone. The father sent the boy to school despite the distance from their home.

This boy says that his father could have made him also a fisher but he sent him to school instead because he "wants me to pursue my dreams."



The Students (Copyright by Miles Films, 2008).



Muslimah, the teacher, and her students (Copyright by Miles Films, 2008).

The students consist of children of workers in the mining company, a Chinese-descent boy, a “special child” and the son of a poor fisher. There was only one girl student, although a second girl student enrolled later (who is from a rich family).

The school is the oldest Islamic primary school in the island. Harfan, the head of the school, says that it is a “school where moral lessons are taught to produce upright citizens.”

The school head is asked: “Harfan, shouldn’t we just close the Muhammadiyah Elementary?” Harfan responds,

The school should never be closed! Because this is the only school that does not teach material pursuit. It is about values. Intelligence is not measured by grades but by this [pointing to his chest] ... by the heart.

Harfan tells the students:

Live to give as much as you can, not take as much as you can.

When one teacher asked to quit teaching in the school to be able to work in another school with better pay, the distraught other teacher (Muslimah) comments:

Nobody cares about our school, Sir. Nobody believes that poor children also have the right to learn.

Harfan answers:

Yes, but what’s important is that we don’t give up hope. Our job is to encourage the children to dare to dream!

The school suffers from lack of funds causing delay in the payment of salary to the two teachers and being unable to purchase needed materials such as chalk for the blackboard.

But the school has very good students who compete against students in the other schools. They win a parade contest on mere creativity and a scho-

lastic contest because the poor son of a fisher is a genius. The school accepts Harun, the child with a mental disability.

The movie ends with a quote of Article 31 (Section XIII: Education and Culture) of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution:

Each citizen has the right to an education.

Movies as Human Rights Education Materials

Laskar Pelangi is a very entertaining movie. It is based on the bestselling novel of the same title by Andrea Hirata. It was made in 2013 and has become one of the most popular commercial movies in Indonesia in recent years. It won awards and recognition in different film festivals within and outside Indonesia.

Laskar Pelangi, meaning “rainbow troops” in English, refers to the eleven students who struggle to learn inside and outside their dilapidated school.

The theme song of the movie also entitled *Laskar Pelangi* has become a hit, both in Indonesia and abroad. The song speaks of the rainbow troops not being bound by time, not stopping in coloring the billions of dreams in this world, and of dancing and keeping on laughing

though the world is not as beautiful as heaven.

Because of the popularity of the movie, the island of Belitung has become a tourist attraction with the small school as a place that must be visited.

Such a popular movie bearing important messages has a lot of elements that make it an excellent material in teaching and learning human rights.

It speaks of social realities - domination by a mining company over the natural resources of the island, the dependence of the people in the island on employment in the company, the poverty in the island despite wealth



(Copyright by Miles Films, 2008).

from its natural resources, diversity in society with the presence of Chinese-Indonesians, the struggle to give education to children from poor families by two determined educators, the acceptance in the school of a child with learning disability, and the natural capacity of students to excel in their study despite poor educational facilities and materials.

It has messages about the purpose of education: make people give as much as they can rather than take as much as they can, encourage the children to dare to dream, and intelligence is not measured by grades but by the heart. These messages relate to one of the purposes of education from the human rights perspective, the full development of the human personality.

The ending of the movie with a quote of the right to education provision in the Indonesian Constitution expresses what the movie stands for. This constitutional provision complements the statement of Muslimah about poor children having the “right to learn.”

Laskar Pelangi is an example of a movie that can relay a human rights message to the general public. It illustrates how such right can be supported and helped realized. It provides an example of how people who have been marginalized in society can fulfil their right to education. The school setting is a natural venue in presenting in concrete this human rights message. But the movie also shows the challenge of making the society in general become supportive of the realization of the rights of its marginalized members.

Social Change and Education

Realizing human rights requires a supportive society. This even requires social change, which involves the change of mindset and behavior.

Social change cannot happen by working only on a single sector of society – be it the people who suffer from discrimination and other human rights violations and abuse, or the “other” people who may constitute the majority and can cause the suffering.

Human rights education is certainly meant to empower those who are marginalized, vulnerable and victims of human rights violations and abuse. But it is also meant to make those who are not marginalized, vulnerable and victims to respect, protect and realize the human rights of everyone.

How can formal education facilitate social change? How is human rights education in the school system able to affect those who are not supposed to be suffering from human rights violations or abuses?

Education for Non-sufferers

The case of Dowa education is a good material on this point. Dowa education is considered to be one of the pillars of human rights education in Japan. It is meant to eradicate discrimination against a section of the Japanese population called *Buraku* people who have been treated as outcast centuries ago and still suffer discrimination at present.

The movement fighting this discrimination (Buraku Liberation Movement) sees Dowa education as a “set of educational strategies for democratizing the whole society to attain true equality of opportunity for Buraku and other oppressed populations.”³³

It sees the objectives of Dowa education as follows:

1. Attaining parity in the level of educational achievement and in the rate of enrollment in secondary schools and in higher education institutions;
2. Developing critical literacy and sound learning capacities for Buraku children; and
3. Promoting community involvement in setting up school agenda.

The Buraku Liberation Movement saw the need to improve on their past experiences in Dowa education. By 1997, necessary changes had been identified:³⁴

The important lessons learned from past efforts is that it is not enough to provide better school facilities, more teachers and more financial support for Buraku children, that it is not enough to provide more books and educational stimuli at home, and that it is not enough to tell stories of sad experiences of being discriminated against repeatedly in classes to invite sympathy and empathy with those who are discriminated against.

Dowa education now has to design (1) effective methods to improve Buraku children's sense of pride and self-esteem, (2) approaches to motivate them to challenge the limit of their potential so they can participate in a wider world of opportunities, (3) stimulating ways to encourage non-Buraku children to think of Buraku and human rights issues not just as others' business but as important matters to help enrich their mind, perspective and interpersonal sensitivities, and (4) effective curricula to educate a human rights-conscious generation of youngsters.

The third idea of “stimulating ways to encourage non-Buraku children to think of Buraku and human rights issues not just as others’ business but as important matters to help enrich their mind, perspective and interpersonal sensitivities,” deserves more discussion.

The research of Nobutaka Oba points out the problem of making non-Buraku students appreciate Dowa education.

He provides what can be considered as representative of the impact of Dowa education on some of his non-Buraku students. Here are a couple of statements from his students:³⁵

I know discrimination is very unjust. But among the people around me there have never been any people who were discriminated against and I have never seen anyone discriminate. You would be better to talk to older people who don’t know discrimination is unjust. We have been taught about the issue of discrimination, and we know that in a democratic society people who are the same human beings as ourselves must not be discriminated against. It makes us interested to know who is *buraku* around us. They are the reason that discrimination continues to exist.

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Although I recognize I should stand for anti-discrimination because discrimination is unjust, I regard it as a distinct issue from that of my marriage. It wouldn’t be something I would endure alone; I think (such a marriage) would also be problematic for my parents and relatives.³⁶

Oba had been hearing these comments as a teacher year after year from his students. He categorized their comments into four types:³⁷

1. As I know discrimination is unjust, discrimination is not my business’;
2. ‘Those suffering discrimination are perhaps different’;
3. ‘Discrimination is an affair between those suffering from discrimination and those who don’t know it is unjust’; and
4. ‘If we are interested in differences, discrimination will remain.’

The comments mean that instead of convincing the students to help eradicate discrimination through Dowa education, they find justification for its existence. The other implication is that the less they know about the *Buraku* issue, the more chance that they will not discriminate.

Oba sees the problem of Dowa Education in the following manner:³⁸

... in practice, most *dowa* education, especially for non-*buraku* people, simply stated the fact that the origin of discrimination against *buraku* lay in the feudal caste system reiterating that '*buraku* people are the same as us and therefore discrimination against them is unjust'. While the approach to discrimination of focusing on the object of that discrimination has played the role of revealing the plight of the sufferers and the existence of discrimination, it has also caused various problems. This approach has the propensity to draw awareness away from political and socio-economic relationships and discriminatory relationships in everyday life and how these relationships have been and are constructed, instead encouraging people to infer why *buraku* people suffer from discrimination, attributing the existence of discrimination to the sufferers themselves.

Their education had told them 'we are all the same humans therefore discrimination is unjust' and 'even now discrimination against *buraku* remains', and they equated 'sameness' with 'equality' and 'difference' with 'discrimination'. Following this logic, they discovered an answer to the question 'Why do these people suffer discrimination?' Their answer was that those suffering from discrimination must be discriminated against because they are somehow different.

He believes that the understanding of the "political and socio-economic relationships and discriminatory relationships in everyday life and how these relationships have been and are constructed" should be the main objective in Dowa education.

This view is requiring a closer scrutiny of the dynamics that govern relationships which might have led to discriminatory attitude or behavior toward the Buraku people. How non-Buraku people label or categorize the Buraku people or any other people would be crucial to know.

Additionally, this view of human rights education supports the reality of the "ordinariness" of human rights violation or abuse. And unless we consider this, human rights education becomes a medium for knowing great issues (or great stories for Oba) that have no relevance to daily life (as Oba has argued).

This is an area that needs further study, or search for relevant practices of human rights education.

Education for the Discriminated

The desired effect of human rights education should also refer to situations outside the classroom and school. In human rights education, we speak of skills in dealing with life situations that can invariably involve human rights issues.

A study of the effect of Dowa education on the *Buraku* students is a good reference on this issue. When the *Buraku* students are outside the confines of a supportive environment (student group [*Kodomo Kai*], classroom, school, family and local community), will they be able to assert their identity and their right to be treated equal once they reveal such identity?³⁹

Christopher Bondy studied the case of *Buraku* students who went to a school that has a Dowa education program. The students are taught how to respond to situations of discrimination based on their identity as *Buraku* people. Will they be able to use what they learned in school when they are outside their own community?

He explains the issue⁴⁰

when the students move from the protective cocoon of their experiences in the community and sense of self at the end of junior secondary school, they face risk, the risk inherent in a new situation for which they must reflexively restructure their identity. How the individual reacts to the risk experience will then reshape the self. The reshaped identity, as part of the biography of the self, is changed for future experiences.

How do people then manage a buraku identity? What techniques are used to engage or not engage, with buraku issues? One method is to openly embrace being burakumin.

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How the students react to discrimination or a lack of awareness from other students once they leave the confines of Takagawa is perhaps the most telling symbol of the effectiveness of the Kaiho [Dowa] education.⁴¹

Students will have to face this “new social situation without the strength of others with them.”⁴²

And their response can be like this:

As Tetsuya, a popular boy who was active in the Kodomo Kai noted,

In junior high, we learned how to have the strength to challenge discrimination in high school and beyond... but now...I don't know... I don't really have the strength ...

Others may have a more positive experience as in the case of Junko:⁴³

With her background, her role in the movement and the engagement her family had with Buraku issues, Junko was one of those, if not perhaps the most likely, to openly maintain and interact through a Buraku identity. Yet Junko initially refrained from interacting using this Buraku identity, at least with her new friends. Despite having numerous friends and a boyfriend, she did not share her background with anyone. It was not until ten months after she began dating her boyfriend that she finally had the courage to tell him about her background. She was filled with anxiety about telling him. She had spoken at length with her parents, and they encouraged her to do what she felt comfortable with. This was something that Junko would have to deal with on her own. She did not know how he would react. Would this be the end of their relationship? Junko said she did not want this at all, but did not want to go on with such a big part of herself hidden from the one she cared about. She explained that the anxiety was almost overwhelming in knowing that sharing a part of who she was could mean the end of their relationship. At the same time, she did not feel that she could continue on with him without telling him about all of herself. She made her decision. She explained to him that she grew up in a Buraku district, that she was Burakumin. His reaction to this confession was one of the last things that Junko expected:

“Burakumin? What’s that?” though he was from the same prefecture, her boyfriend did not have any idea what this meant. She found herself explaining what it meant to her to be Burakumin. For him, this meant little in how they related to one another. He did not fully know what being Burakumin meant, but he knew that he wanted to be with her.

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Junko’s family had always taken an active role in movement activities, and Junko herself was one of the Kodomo Kai and class leaders. As such, she was one of the students most prepared to take this challenge of opening up to another.

There is indeed a big chance that the students who learned how to respond to discriminatory situations while inside their “cocoon” would not

take the risk of asserting their identity and rights outside of it. And this brings the need to enlarge that “cocoon” – education for the whole society and for everyone – so as not to put the burden of realizing rights only to those who assert them. The protection and realization of human rights is a responsibility of the society as a whole. And this requires social change.

Social change means changing mindset and behavior of most people in society. Thus educational interventions cannot be narrow in scope (not limited to either the marginalized or to the majority) and must consider the importance of education in affecting thinking and behavior in the family, community and society.

Messages of Change in Society

Messages of change are needed to facilitate social change. The messages in this case include human rights.

Human rights messages can be expressed by those who suffer from human rights violations or abuse such as through literature festivals of the discriminated peoples (such as the Dalit Literature Festival), cultural activities of a minority group in a community (such as *Eisa*), and the use of mainstream media from rap singing to moviemaking (Sumeet’s rap and the “Respeto” and “Laskar Pelangi” movies).

Messages of change can be relayed through the “soft approach” of using cultural means such as trendy new songs and dances. But how much of these “pop culture” products convey messages of change that support human rights? Or, how much of their messages are against human rights principles?

Human rights messages can be “counter-messages” to those of the mainstream pop culture and other cultural activities. But in being “counter-messages,” human rights messages cannot be extreme in terms of means and content in the sense that the general population would fail to appreciate the messages.

Human rights messages must touch the issues that affect people in their daily life, not only the big issues that affect the country. These daily issues are problems faced by people, and have human rights implications, such as being victims of discrimination, abuse (in various senses - psychological, emotional and mental), violence, displacement from sources of livelihood,

and also lack of food, shelter and medicine. Some of these issues affect all – both marginalized and non-marginalized people.

In this sense, there is no other option than to use whatever means are available in bringing the human rights messages to everyone in society.

Endnotes

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3 1st DALIT LITERATURE FESTIVAL 2019, 3-4 February, 2019 | Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi, invitation sent by e-mail to Dalit Media Watch by the organizers of the festival dated 1 February 2019.

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5 Themes and sub-themes of the Dalit Literature Festival 2019:

The Term Dalit : Historical and conceptual framework,

Dalit Literature, Culture and Art : Trends and Issues, Women’s writings: issues and concerns

Dalit Literature & Dalit Historiography, Dalit literature: Oral vs Written, Bahujan/ backward Literature: Trends and Issues, Nomadic Literature, Culture and Art :

Trends and Issues, Resistance and Reconstruction, Social Justice, equality and dignity: society, literature and future, Pasamanda groups: Literature and Future

Dalit Literature: Politics of Translation, Dalit, Afro-American and Aboriginal Identities: Convergence and Comparative Perspectives (Concept note on the 1st Dalit Literature Festival 2019)

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21 *Ibid*.

22 “Drumming out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan” (2003), directed by Terada Yoshitaka and produced by the National Museum of Ethnology (Japan).

23 For a discussion on the discrimination experienced by older Okinawan residents in Osaka, read Yoshitaka Terada, “Rooted as Banyan Trees+ Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan,” in T. Rice, editor, *Ethnomusicological Encounters with Music and Musicians: Essays in Honor of Robert Garfias*, 2011, Surrey: Ashgate, pages 235-236.

24 Terada, *ibid.*, page 237. Also the video documentary “Drumming out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan” (2003), *ibid*.

25 This and other quotations in this section about the young Okinawan workers are from the video documentary “Drumming out a Message: Eisa and the Okinawan Diaspora in Japan” (2003), *ibid.*, unless otherwise indicated.

26 Terada, op. cit., pages 237-238.

27 Terada, *ibid.*, pages 233-234.

28 Terada, *ibid.*, page 235.

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30 Definition of *pesantren*:

A type of school in Southeast Asia offering second-level training in Islamic subjects. The term is *pesantren* on Java, *surau* on Sumatra, *pondok*

on the Malay Peninsula and Cambodia, and *madrasah* in the Philippines and Singapore. *Pesantren* derives from the sixteenth century, when learning centers were established, known as a place of learning for the Islamic faithful (*santris*). *Surau* was a place for worship in early Southeast Asia, while *pondok* derives from the travelers' inns (Ar., *funduq*) of the Middle East. *Madrasah* is the generic name for such schools throughout the Islamic world.

Pesantren are private ventures by scholars called *kyai* on Java, *guru* on the Malay Peninsula and Brunei, *ustadz* in the Philippines, Cambodia, and Thailand, and *'alim* in most places—usually with the assistance of their families. Many schools do not survive the founder, but others continue [for] several generations, with sons and sons-in-law succeeding to control and ownership. Prestige is gained by scholars with good contacts with other scholarly families, some in Arabia, and also through learners who establish new *pesantren* recognizing the original scholars as progenitors. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t236/eo632.

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33 What is Dowa education?, Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute (BLHRRI), www.blhrri.org/old/blhrri_e/dowaeducation/de_0003.htm.

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43 *Ibid.*, pages 94-95.

Appendix

WONOSOBO DECLARATION TO STRENGTHEN TOLERANCE, INCLUSIVITY AND JUSTICE IN INDONESIA

We recognize that respect, protection, and the fulfillment of human rights are the responsibility of the State, and the Government. The term “Government” includes the central government, the provincial government, the regional, and city governments.

We recognize that the implementation of respect, protection and the fulfillment of human rights require the full cooperation and participation of all parties. This includes the government, civil society and other parties.

We recognize that the Indonesian community faces challenges in the form of the emergence of practices of intolerance, which have the potential to reduce the enjoyment of human rights, and can be a source of instability which will erode and undermine the values of nationalism that are diverse, equal and tolerant.

We recognize that local governments have a very important role to play in the implementation of human rights responsibilities. This equates to, but is not limited to, maintaining and caring for social cohesion and Indonesian unity.

Therefore, in order to advocate values of diversity, and strengthen solidarity for an inclusive and equitable Indonesia, we commit and are ready to make every effort to do the following steps:

1. Improve and maintain the social values and attitudes of tolerance in every community in Indonesia through various approaches, including education and arts and culture, creating and multiplying the space for dialogue for all parties, inter-religious, inter-group, interracial, and intergenerational events. The signatories of this declaration agree that the 2019 election process will be one of the most important milestones in the process of consolidating democracy in Indonesia. As such, parties will make effort to ensure that events relating to the election will run smoothly and peacefully by promoting respect, protection and the fulfillment of human rights for all citizens.

2. Conduct multi-stakeholder cooperation in knowledge

management and action collaboration to realize inclusive development practices, for the protection and fulfilment of human rights in accordance with the principle of rights based approach and ensure that no one is left behind in an effort acceleration of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).

3. Strengthening the District/City Human Rights movement by establishing a Regency/City Human Rights Network, and making the Indonesian Human Rights Festival an annual agenda.

Wonosobo, November 14, 2018.

Note:

The Wonosobo Declaration was signed at the Human Rights Festival in Wonosobo, Yogyakarta (Festival HAM 2018), organized by the National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia and held from 13 to 15 November 2018, www.komnasham.go.id/index.php/news/2018/11/15/683/wonosobo-declaration-on-human-rights-festival-2018.html.