

# Human Rights Education in School: Loreto Sealdah

SR. M. CYRIL

**L**oreto Day School (Loreto Sealdah) was established 1857 in Sealdah, Kolkata, India. In 1979 it started an experiment in education born of a certain uneasiness felt at being part of a formal school system imparting ‘quality education’ to a privileged few, while millions of their less fortunate peer group get virtually nothing at all.

This started opening up the school more and more to underprivileged youngsters from slum areas and pavements, to produce a healthy mix of children from all social, financial and religious backgrounds. This resulted in a school population of students almost half of which are from the nearby slums and given totally free education.

Loreto Sealdah at present is a school with 1,500 female students of which 721 are from very poor families whose every need has to be taken care of – food, medicine, rations, shoes, books, uniforms, even money to meet the rent which eviction threatens. In many instances the school has also helped families set up a small-scale business, by providing interest-free loans in order to become self-supporting. Sometimes it reached out to the family as a whole, be it a drug addict father, or an errant sibling or an ailing member.

60% of the poor students reside in sprawling slums, inhuman conditions, mounting piles of garbage, narrow alleyways and serpentine tunnels. In such condition, rows upon rows of tiny oneroom structures stretch separated by one brick walling or at times bamboo slating partitions.

These children, in their turn, along with those who pay fees are involved in reaching

out to others even less privileged than themselves through a broad spectrum of services, touching as many people as possible.

In this way Loreto Sealdah seeks to become a resource center for the community creating in the process dynamic people, with the values of giving, sharing and extended love – a vibrant, living instrument for human change.

We started educating the children on human rights from 1981, when we first began our Village Program. In 1985, the children themselves expanded it into the Rainbow Program for the street children. Then we began the program for Hidden Domestic Child Labor in 2001 and Childline around the same time. Each one of these programs came out of the reflection of the children on some situation or another of injustice and we have continued with them because the situation still warrants our involvement. Over the years, the children have been able to see the change in attitude which has taken place in society here in Kolkata and other parts of the country because of the pioneering work we have done, where people can see how successful this education has been in preparing agents of human change. For this reason, it has been taken up by various schools all over the country.

### Teaching Human Rights

The list of human rights as enunciated by the United Nations is basically a list of decent behaviors which each human being is expected to accord to another, and if all people lived by these tenets of decency there would be universal peace. Basically, human rights are nothing else than loving one's neighbor as oneself – a mandate echoed in the scriptures of all the great religious traditions of which we have many in our pluralistic, secular Indian society. If this value of love were lived out on a global level we would have no corruption, no exploitation, no ethnic cleansing, no wars, no communal tension, no caste differences, and apartheid would never have happened.

Unfortunately, even though people are aware, human rights are still frequently ignored even in supposedly “civilized” countries. Selfishness, greed, ambition, fear, all play a role in preventing one section of humanity from being allowed to enjoy their rights by another section who refuses to share the good things of which they often have more than they need.

Hence, any education on human rights in schools has to be as much or more formative than informative. In other words, if human rights education in schools is to be effective, it has to be experienced in working practically for those rights while the child is still in school and capable of being guided in the right direction.

This is why we would like to present here our experiment in helping children not only to know what their rights are but to be actively involved in working to see that everyone has these rights fulfilled especially the children around them.

Hence our Values Education program is carried out at two levels:

a. Theoretical Lessons – Intellectual Input

This takes place inside the classroom according to a special lesson plan format (Basic Plan, Annex A) which involves the children in a participative manner. Three sample lessons are the following:

Lesson 1: *Rights of the Child*, suitable for 10 to 12 year olds

Lesson 2: *All men are equal, but...*, suitable for 13 – 15 year olds

Lesson 3: *A world we ignore – Survey*, suitable for 14 – 16 year olds.

b. Practical Lessons – Emotional Bonding

We have selected the following areas for practical exposure for our students:

Education

Child Labor

Nutrition

Shelter

Love and belonging.

Education

*Rainbow*: Half the world's children not in school are Indian children, deprived of their basic right to education. While our school cannot reach *all* children, it can reach those around the school. Hence, our Rainbow Program for which all children from 10 years old onwards have 2 periods per week on their time table when they teach children coming off the streets whom we call Rainbow children. So throughout the day we have a reservoir of 50 potential teachers from one class or another free and ready to teach whoever comes off the street. In this way an eleven year old coming in completely illiterate can be prepared in one year, if she comes regularly, for Class V in a regular school in her own mother tongue. Each Loreto Sealdah student stays back on a rotation system to teach those who whose work prevents them from coming until late afternoon.

Once slotted into school in a class consonant with their own age, these children, while still living on the streets, get all the home support (uniform, place to bathe, wash clothes, do homework, have a meal) from school and are able to survive well.

*Rural Child to Child*: Every Thursday, our school holiday, one quarter of all our Second-

ary School students, i.e., 150 out of 600, move out into villages around Kolkata and handle 3,500 rural children in government primary schools where the ratio is one teacher to 120 children. At least once a week each child gets individual attention and the regular students who teach from the age of 10 are exposed to situations of injustice and challenged to do what they can to set things right. At the same time, they have their regular lessons on human rights where they discuss their experiences and plan how to move on an advocacy level for a more universal solution from the government.

*Survey and Advocacy:* Further still, the school had conducted a survey of Kolkata with the help of other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and our school students in which they searched for and found 44,000 children not in school. Through advocacy with the local government, 100 schools were created to take in 5,000 of those children, while we got another 10,000 children into existing vacancies and trained 1,200 more young people from the slums to cater to another 26,000 children in 400 small centers of 50-80 children each. In all of this, our students have been involved in counting, packing materials, assisting the training in various ways and understanding how the rights of the children have been denied. They have studied the amount spent on educating these children and compared it with how much is spent on them as students of a good school, and have built up presentations on rights and justice and sent them to the government agencies concerned.

### Child Labor

Over the past 3 years, our students have developed a unique way of reaching children employed as domestic slaves in people's houses. They have identified 4,900 such children and have got another 10 schools in the city involved with them, with 6 drop-in centers in 6 schools, worked by the students themselves, who scour

each neighborhood for these children. So far they have managed to persuade 100 employers to send the children to school, and have rescued several who were being abused and admitted them into our Rainbow Program. All our students are so well versed in human rights that they are able to persuade employers to change their attitudes towards these children.

### Child Line

This is another area where our students are brought face-to-face with violations of child rights and where they go out to take meetings in the community to share with adults their concerns about such violations.

### Nutrition

Every child has a right to food, so we feed over 700 children daily in our school. Children help to prepare and distribute food and some food is also sent home for younger siblings so they are not brain-damaged coming to school. Every child coming off the street is welcomed by other children/students already in the program and fed. Old abandoned widows on the streets around the school are fed by the students also.

### Shelter

Although the school is a large English medium institution that suggests to people of elitism and exclusiveness, our students have learned practically that all people have right to shelter and therefore our school and all other Loreto Schools have become "Home" to as many street children as needed to be safe off the streets and in a secure environment.

### The Right to Love and to Belong

Our students imbibe this particular right by living in an atmosphere where there are so many children off the streets, with no parents,

no one to care for them and who need the love the regular children can give. This has developed tremendous bonds which transcend all barriers of home background, caste, creed, economic differences. Human rights in such an atmosphere are taken for granted, love and bonding take place naturally, especially as they are continually backed up by the constant exposure to and experiences with children who have been denied their rights.

The old people who are fed daily are also catered to emotionally as the students who take their lunch out to them on the streets sit and chat with them like they would with their own grandparents.

We have, through our 'hands on' experiential living out of those rights which fall within the children's capacity to pursue, created in the students certain basic attitudes which make it quite impossible for them to contravene the rights of others. These attitudes are:

- a. A compassion and sensitivity to those deprived of their rights and a determination to see that they get a fair share of all that is available.
- b. A willingness and courage to stand out for what they believe to be right, e.g., the rescue and release of hidden domestic child laborers where they have to face irate employers, call the police and testify in public.
- c. A sense of equality with those who have been marginalized so that they relate quite naturally and accept them and make them feel at home.
- d. A selfless dedication to the cause of marginalized children deprived of their rights which prepares them to sacrifice time and effort to support and help them (marginalized children).

### **Students Response /Reaction to the Program**

Through the years, students express their thoughts about their experience under the program. Here are some examples of such thoughts.

### **Past pupils**

As an ex-student of Loreto Sealdah, I feel I am most fortunate to have received my education through most practical and meaningful educational system that aims to nurture true human beings! I was always a mediocre student in school who merely passed all the exams; but I was exposed to so much caring services for the poor and have-nots, that it became a source of inspiration for me! I never felt the need to compete with the most academically brilliant student in my class but I was always happy and fulfilled as a human being when I reached out my hand to someone in need. Today I am 35 and I feel I have been truly educated as I am not afraid to voice my opinion and even fight, if necessary, for any one who deserves justice and respect as human being. My free time is not devoted to social gatherings but to look after elderly destitute on the streets. That's what Loreto education does... it builds true mind and soul!

– *Ms. Sanghita Mondol*

The education I received at Loreto Sealdah has helped me to be an independent person with a wider outlook towards Indian society. I love and understand the underprivileged and, as a primary school teacher, have a special care for the most marginalized children.

– *Mrs. Asha Baski*

I have been helped to gain self confidence and to be able to communicate better through my experience here in Loreto Sealdah in reaching out to others more marginalized than myself. I am now working for Childline, the main objective of which is to help to give immediate care to the most destitute children in distress. My earlier experience in school have helped me very much in fighting for justice for these children.

– *Ms. Mehtab Ara*

## Present pupils

Human rights are very essential for the growth of the country, of the world and in fact of humanity as a whole. By safeguarding human rights we are making the world a better place to live in for our next generation – as children are the future of our country. The present change cannot be brought about overnight, hence we need more people to join our mission and help in the propagation of this idea.

We work with Childline, going out from school to build awareness so that children all over the city in distress can ring up 1098 and get help. We also run a drop-in center in our spare time in the afternoon where child domestic workers can come to relax or study as they like.

All our school from class V upwards are involved in some way to work for justice. *We have been helping, we are helping and we will*

*continue to help “to make this world a better place for you and me”.*

*– Sharine Lazaru and Shefali Biswas*

To sum up, we have found the formula of reflection leading to action and action followed by reflection a very effective tool in education and especially in education on human rights. But most of all it is important that, when we expose our students to situations of injustice, we need to challenge the less motivated and give an outlet for the frustration the compassionate student feels, on being confronted with a situation about which she can do nothing.

This approach which we have developed, of intellectual input on the situation and practical involvement in changing it, means that we have a highly motivated group of young people coming out each year with both the skills and the motivation to change, at least, their little corner of the world.

## ANNEXES

## THE BASIC PLAN

*Each lesson is normally divided into the phases given below. Each phase is designed to provide the child with an experience of certain values and a practice of certain skills regardless of what the topic of the lesson is.*

	<i>What the child does</i>	<i>What you do</i>	<i>What values and qualities the child gets the opportunity to develop</i>	<i>What intellectual and social skills the child has the opportunity to master</i>
KEY-IN	Work alone on the material set in the lesson.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an atmosphere which is relaxed yet quiet, and insist that each child works <i>alone</i>.</li> <li>• Give reassurance that there are no right/wrong answers, and that each one's opinion is important.</li> <li>• Give guidance, if needed, so that the child knows what to do. Do <i>not</i> give answers.</li> </ul>	Freedom, self-awareness, responsibility, openness, the courage to form and express an opinion of his/her own.	The ability... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–to concentrate</li> <li>–to read understand and evaluate</li> <li>–to work independently</li> <li>–to articulate ideas</li> </ul>
SHARE-IT-AROUND	Sits in a small group of a maximum of eight with his/her classmates and shares the results of his/her personal work. This may lead to a discussion and/or some group activity such as chart making, role plays, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the children into groups.</li> <li>• Circulate from group to group.</li> <li>• Do <i>not</i> interfere unless the group is obviously out of hand and needs to be settled.</li> <li>• Give as much freedom as possible.</li> <li>• Provide guidance only if requested, <i>never</i> solutions or answers.</li> </ul>	Love and concern for others, listening with compassion and sympathy, trust, loyalty, openness, honesty, mutual respect, tolerance, acceptance, cooperation, communicativeness, initiative, leadership.	The ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–present ideas coherently,</li> <li>–express herself/himself clearly,</li> <li>–listen with understanding,</li> <li>–respond to new ideas,</li> <li>–plan,</li> <li>–be creative,</li> <li>–make decisions,</li> <li>–choose material,</li> <li>–present material.</li> </ul>
PASS-IT-ON	The group presents to the whole class, its findings either through a direct report or through whatever group activity it has prepared.	Listen carefully to what is said, for points/ideas which can be discussed later, write these briefly on the blackboard, especially note statements or generalisations which reveal values that you feel need to be challenged. (This is mainly at the adolescent stage, but younger children will also give expression to negative values which can cause concern.)	Self-confidence, the courage of his/her convictions, the ability to work as part of a team, learning to be useful.	The ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–communicate,</li> <li>–think logically,</li> <li>–speak clearly,</li> <li>–present material coherently,</li> <li>–synthesise material,</li> <li>–make connections.</li> </ul>
TALK-IT-OVER	The class is guided in analyzing the material presented in the 'Pass-it-on' phase so as to see clearly what values their presentations reveal and how such values compared with those of the great religious or social leaders of India and the world.	Prompt the class through meaningful questioning and help them see the difference between what they know is the ideal and what they actually practise. Encourage them to interact with each other and insist on parliamentary procedure—listening to the others before responding. Do not allow splinter groups to start discussing things among themselves.	Love for truth, honesty, humility, the ability to listen and to respond, the courage to uphold one's convictions, or to change if one honestly sees that one is wrong.	Develops... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–logical thinking,</li> <li>–comprehension,</li> <li>–communication skills.</li> <li>–The ability to: interpret, summarize, and analyze, be creative, make decisions, judge ideas and attitudes.</li> </ul>

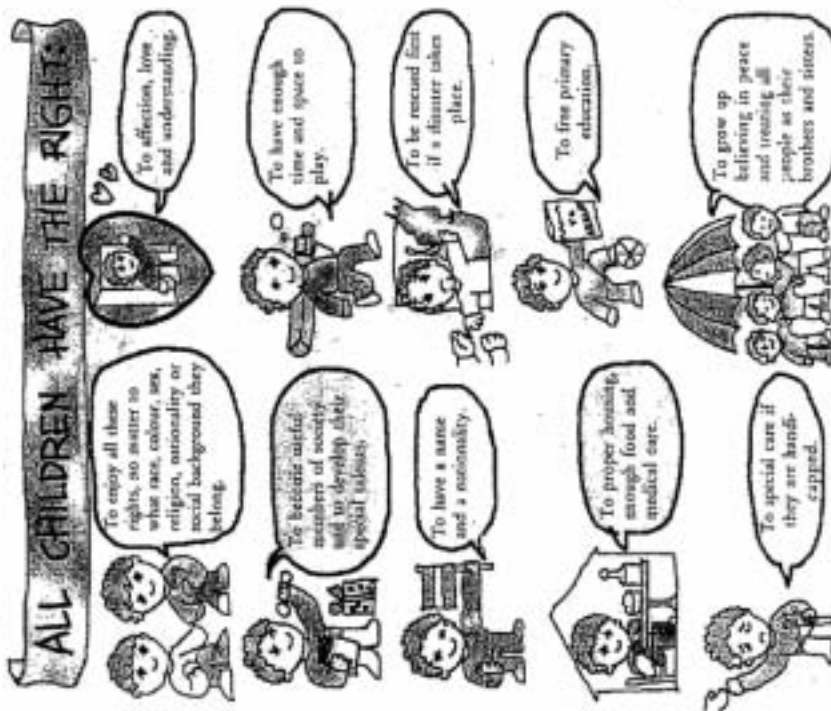
*The Basic Plan (continuation)...*

	<i>What the child does</i>	<i>What you do</i>	<i>What values and qualities the child gets the opportunity to develop</i>	<i>What intellectual and social skills the child has the opportunity to master</i>
THINK-IT-THROUGH	Sits along to evaluate what he/she has learned from the lesson, and possibly notes down insights or important points that struck him/her.	Provide a quiet, relaxed atmosphere (perhaps by playing appropriate music on a tape-recorder). Ensure that the children do not disturb each other. Let them reflect quietly on the insights provided to them by the lesson. After some time (depending on the maturity of the children—five minutes for young children, up to 30 minutes for the older ones) elicit these from the class and write down the important points on the blackboard. (Do not continue the silence for too long if the children are very restless.)	Personal responsibility, personal honesty, humility, self-awareness.	Intellectual honesty, clarity of thoughts, accuracy.
TAKE-IT-IN	Continues to sit quietly. The idea is to develop habits of silence and contemplation. Starting from the experience of just being quiet for a while, this will progressively become a more spiritual experience in which children pray, make decisions, think about their lives and examine their own and other's attitudes.	Lead the session quietly from the decision making of the 'Think-it-through' stage to the spiritual experience of silence which is what this phase is all about. Actually these two phases flow together as one. A <i>bhajan</i> suitable to the theme, or soft devotional music can be played here.	An awareness of the spiritual dimension in oneself.	
CARRY-IT-THROUGH	Carries out whatever action she/he had decided on during the lesson.	Do not interfere especially where adolescents are concerned. It is important to be liberal here and to allow the children to act as they have decided. If they share their thoughts with you, it must be on their own volition. If they don't it does not matter. Either way, over a period of a year or so, experience will show you that most children respond to this system if it is used with competence and understanding.	Personal responsibility, personal freedom, determination, perseverance.	Learn to be... –practical, –self-analytical.

*Sometimes, especially in junior classes, one or other of the earlier phases may be dropped. However, since the overall aim of each lesson is to lead the child to self-awareness and growth, the 'Think-it-through' and 'Take-it-in' phases should never be omitted.*

## Rights of the Child

On November 20, 1959, every country in the United Nations agreed that children should have certain rights. They drew up a list of those rights. Although we have a list of rights, it is sad that many millions of children do not enjoy them.



Unlike Mandala, you enjoy some of these rights. Put a  next to the rights you enjoy.

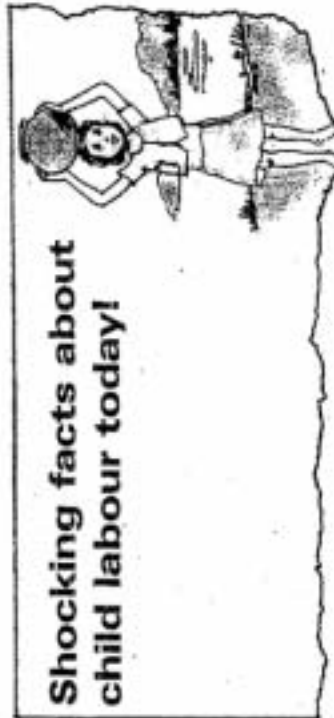
Cross the ones you do *not* enjoy. Go through the 'Rights' again. Do all children enjoy these?

in your country .....  
 in your city .....  
 in your neighbourhood .....

Think of one person in your neighbourhood who does not enjoy most of these rights.

Sit in small groups and talk about the story of Mandala. Have you seen others like him? What will happen to children like him?

Now, together, prepare a front page of a newspaper to show this. (You can use newspaper headlines, stories or pictures.)



Show your newspaper page to the class and to your teacher. Choose one person to explain what has been done.

Listen to what everyone has to say and discuss with your teacher why these things might happen.

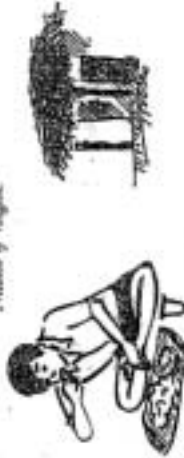


**15** *All men are equal, but...*

A fundamental right is a 'right' that every human being should have. Think of the two words 'fundamental rights'. What do these really mean? Here are a few of them.



Freedom of religion



Right to food and shelter



Right to justice



Freedom of speech



Right to education



Right to equal opportunities

A few of you can write these out in bold letters and put them up in different corners in your classroom.

This part of the session should be done individually. Try not to consult each other or talk unnecessarily.

Read the headings that have been put up and ask yourself what having these rights really means to

- you,
- others in your class.

Find headlines, articles, pictures from newspapers, or magazines and pin these up under the appropriate headings.

List the reasons in the space below:

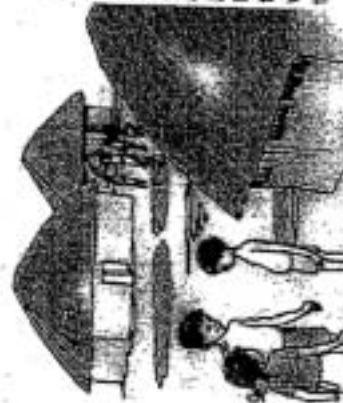
1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

*Children all over the world have these rights but there are many who do not enjoy most of them.*

Sit quietly and think of your own life. You have a chance to enjoy most of these rights. Do you take this for granted?

Or, do you realise how lucky you are? Would you like to do anything to help other children in the world who don't have so many things?

Say this prayer:



Dear loving God,  
Please take care of  
children, who do not have  
clean water, enough food,  
good homes, proper  
schools, doctors and  
hospitals.

Bless those who work for  
them. Help us to share  
with others the good  
things which we enjoy.

Imagine the United Nations has chosen you to see that the children in your neighbourhood enjoyed all their rights. You would...

Write a paragraph on this and put it up in your classroom.





Remember these articles, pictures, etc. could portray the fundamental rights enjoyed or not enjoyed by individuals.

Walk around the classrooms quietly and read the various clippings and articles.

jot down anything that strikes you especially.



Now, get into groups and choose to study one of these rights in detail. Your teacher will help you to do this so that there's no overlapping. Re-read carefully the articles under this heading and discuss what such a 'right' means in practical, everyday life.

Look around for instances in your school/neighbourhood where this fundamental right is being practised or not being practised. In your group, prepare a mime showing how this right can be achieved

*by encroaching on the rights of others, without taking away the rights of others.*

Try to portray situations that you have actually seen.

Present your mime to the group. Carefully watch what the other groups do, too.

Discuss the following questions:

*Do you think the mimes portrayed real-life situations?*

*How do you feel when you see people's rights being encroached upon or their freedom destroyed?*

*How do you feel about the people who took away the rights of others and got off 'free' without opposition?*

*Can rights taken by stepping on other people's rights be called 'fundamental'?*

*Are such occurrences common in our society at large?*

*What is the real reason for some people being denied their fundamental rights?*



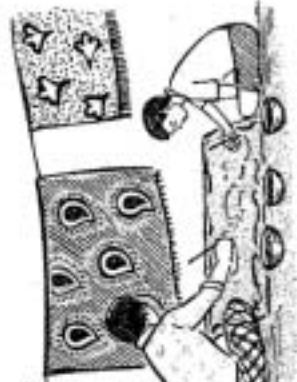
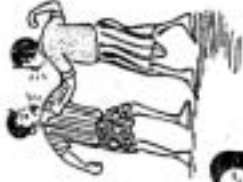
Spend a few minutes to examine your own attitudes. Put yourself in the place of the person whose right has been taken away. How would you feel—angry? Frustrated? anything else?

Read the following prayer for India composed by Rabindranath Tagore:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where Knowledge is free; where the word  
has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls;

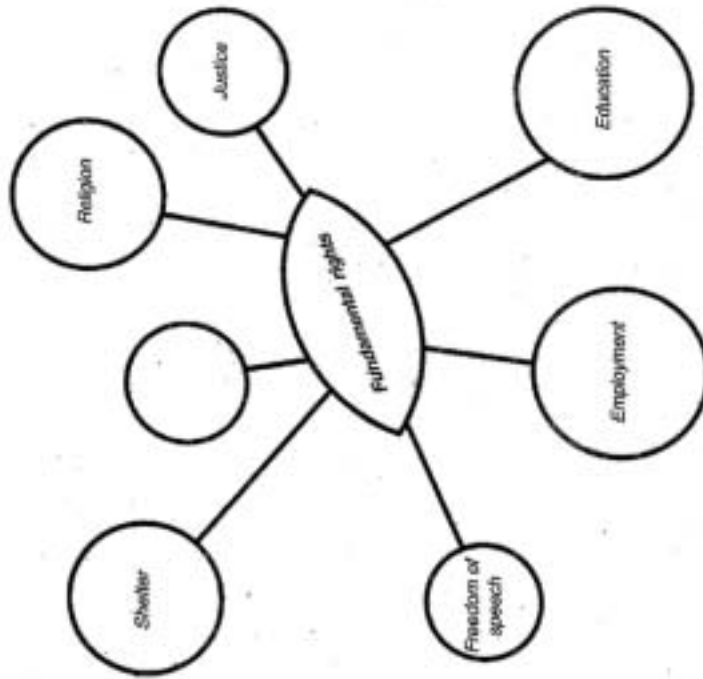
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where restless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not  
lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee  
into everwidening thought and action  
into that heaven of freedom, my Father,  
Let my country awake.

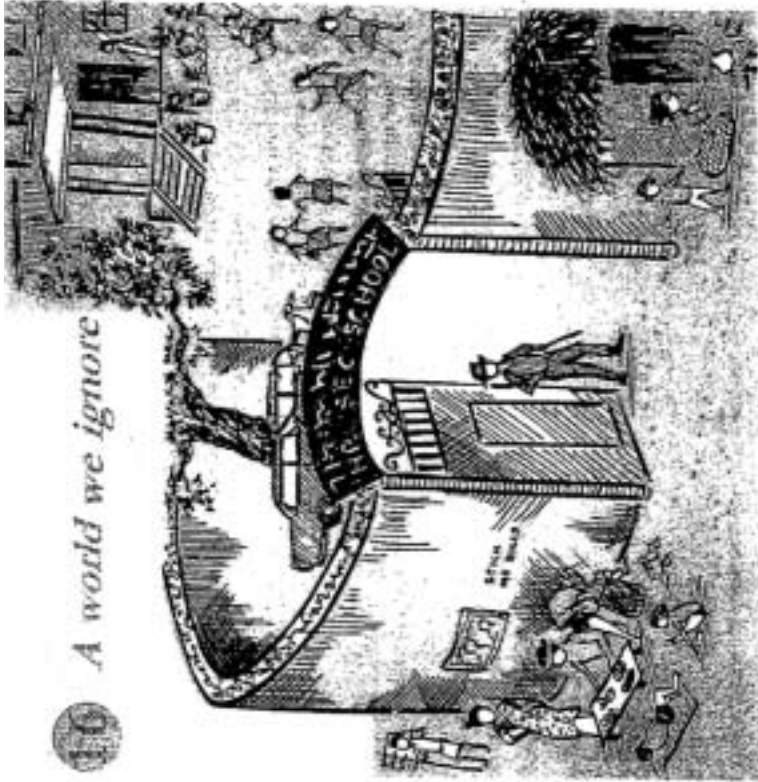


Can you now take one small positive step towards setting right an act of violation of human and fundamental rights in your school/ neighbourhood? What would you choose to do?

Mark this in one of the areas mentioned below and write next to it what you plan to do.



## 10 A world we ignore



This week you will try to carry out a survey of the area around your school or a locality nearby to find out whether

- there are people in your locality who are denied their fundamental rights, and which ones.
- there are opportunities in your locality, for you to provide some of your fundamental rights.

For example, there may be service groups in your local community such as Erasing School, Community Centre for Slums, Medical Clinics, Old People's Homes, Rehabilitation Centres, Schools for the handicapped, Government Agencies for Widows, Wildlife and Environmental Protection groups and so on.

Draw up a list of questions which you think would be necessary to ask for the information you need.



Keep in mind that you have to plan your questions so that the answers clearly give the information you require. For example, information on salaries and hours of work will tell you about exploitation, or questions about whether the children are in school will reveal information on education, and so forth.

Also decide about whom you should interview; you will need to cover a wide range from well-off people to very poor.

Get into your groups. Show your questions to the other members of your group. Compile a list of questions which all of you consider necessary. When you are satisfied with your list, read it out to the entire class.

Conduct a mock interview using the questions you have framed. For this, four members of your group can act as interviewers and the others as those interviewed.

One can act as the mother of the family, etc. The rest of the class looks on and notes down whether:

*the questions are useful and practical and designed to get the information you want; they are asked politely;*

*they are too personal and might offend the person interviewed; the group behaves in a friendly and respectful fashion*

*(e.g., not passing remarks about the houses visited or the people, not whispering among themselves, not demanding information, etc.).*



After each group has had a chance to practise an interview, the rest of the class can criticise, comment and give suggestions for improvement.

Now, consider each question and finally decide on a common list of questions, with the help of your teacher. This will make it easy to collect the information later. In the space below, copy down your final list of questions.

### THE SURVEY

#### Preparation

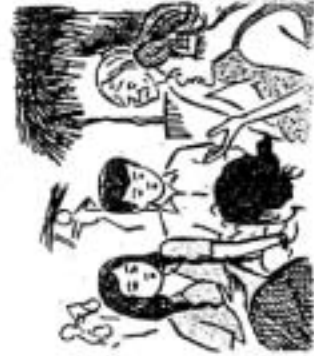
Your teacher will arrange for some of you to go out to make a rough map of the locality around your school or wherever you choose to conduct the survey.

After this choose a specific area within it so that your survey does not overlap with what your other classmates do and people are not harassed by being interviewed several times.



#### Information gathering

Make sure you are familiar with the questions you want to ask so that you do not have to refer to written notes. As far as possible, ask the questions in the course of a conversation. Make sure you introduce yourself politely before you start, and behave as you normally would when invited as guests to someone's house. If you meet with rejection, move off quietly to the next house, and do not react.



When you return from the survey, get into your groups again, and complete the two tasks outlined below:

Pool all the information you have collected. Use a separate sheet to collate each of the sets of information you've gathered under the following headings:

**Fundamental Rights identified:**



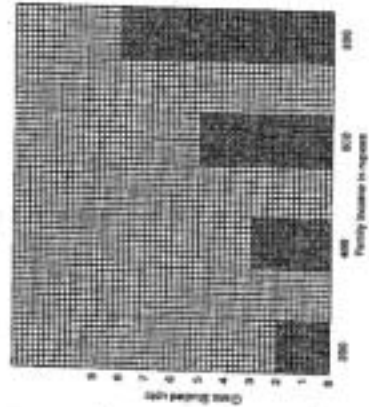
*If you've no information for a particular heading, leave it blank.*

**Opportunities to practise duties**

For this, your teacher will allot one of the headings above for, example, equality, freedom and so on, to each group. One group can deal with opportunities to practise the duties.

Your work will be to collect all the sheets from the other groups pertaining to your heading and write all the information on one sheet. You must then devise some way of presenting this material to the class so that it can be understood quickly and easily.

A pie diagram or other graphical means may be useful here. For example, if you are dealing with education you may find that in the families interviewed some children are not sent to school because of financial constraints or children may have dropped out of school early. You could prepare a chart to show the connection between income and education like this:



Present your findings to the rest of the class. Then discuss the following:

- *What struck you most about your interview?*
- *Is there anything you can do?*
- *Would it be better for you to do nothing?*
- *What are the consequences of what you do or don't do?*
- *Is there place for any initiated action on your part? Where? How?*

Explore all the possibilities before you decide. Keep in mind that when you take up a programme, people depend on you; so, you cannot just walk off when you are tired or bored. Consequently, it is better to take on a limited commitment and persevere in it until you are experienced and committed enough to take on more.

Ask yourself, seriously, to what extent you want to commit yourself or your time. Remember also that a group project can only succeed if all are prepared to join. What about you?

Write down your reactions in the space below.

Spend time with God contemplating on all the gifts He has showered on you. Listen to what He may want you to do in return. Is He calling you to do something for your country and for others? What does He want you to do?



Dhammapada.

*Be prompt in doing good and restrain the mind from evil, for the mind of one who delays the performance of good deeds indulges in evil.*

Maintain a diary or record of what you do each day to help someone else.