

# Human Rights Awareness of Teachers and Teacher Educators: An Investigation

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There is universal concern within the international community about the contribution of human rights education in ensuring the protection and realization of human rights. Over the past fifty years global events and people's experiences have given the quest for ensuring peace through human rights awareness and education a major thrust. International documents on human rights education published during this period especially those of the United Nations form an important part of the worldwide educational discourses indicating a progression towards the establishment of a world education system. India has adopted multipronged strategy for ensuring human rights for its citizens. On the one hand, it incorporated into its Constitution as Fundamental Rights the various human rights provided for in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). On the other hand, keeping in view the ethnic diversity and highly divisive society of India, it also practices the policy of protective discrimination for certain traditionally deprived sections of society like the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), as well as girls and disabled persons. Consequently while ensuring 'equality of opportunity' in matters relating to appointment to any office under the State, it also follows a reservation policy in education and jobs for various disadvantaged sections of society to ensure their adequate representation in education and service sectors.

Education has been considered as the major instrument to address inequalities in the Indian society by promoting equality, social justice and respect for the individual human being, which are preconditions for ensuring rights. The 1986 educational policy of India and its program of action suggest various measures to bring equality through the system of education. A whole chapter of the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) spells out measures to

promote equality of educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of the deprived sections of society. For instance, the NPE 1986 recommends the redesigning of the curriculum, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators to remove gender bias from textbooks, and bring change in the status of women through education, educational development of the SC/ST population and their equalization with non-SC/ST popula-

tion at all stages and levels of education. Certain core values have been identified at the national level and integrated into the entire syllabus of school education across the country. Some of these core values are equalization, democracy, secularism, equality of sexes, and inculcation of scientific temper, etc.

Analyzing the Indian education system from a human rights perspective, Pandey (2005) concluded that it has “followed a ‘Value and Awareness Model’ of human rights education, wherein human rights are not taught as a separate subject, instead, various values related to human rights have been integrated in all subjects and in all stages of school curriculum.” The Curriculum Framework of 2000 reiterated the view that education is an important instrument to fight inequality and to respond to the social, cultural, emotional, and economic needs of students, promote a cohesive society by eliminating biases and imbalances due to caste, class, region, religion, ideology, gender, etc; ensure the right of the child to equal access to quality education and other educational opportunities including those of girls and children with special needs; and cope with the impact of globalization without losing indigenous traditions and identity.

The 2005 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) provides ample opportunities to promote respect for the child as an individual, social justice, equality, tolerance etc. In fact, “commitment to democracy and values of equality, justice, freedom, concern for other’s well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and rights” have been identified as the foremost goals of education. NCF (2005), therefore, expects the school curriculums to provide “adequate experience and space for dialogue and discourse in the school to build such a commitment in children”. “A sensitivity to others’ well-being and feelings, together with knowledge and understanding of the world” are the expected bases of a national commitment to values. In a major departure from the earlier frameworks, however, NCF (2005) tries to shift the focus from traditional-values-based

approach for ensuring human rights to peace-based approach. Consequently, Education for Peace forms an important component of the latest reforms in school education syllabus in India. It tries to nurture ethical development and inculcate attitude, values and skills required for living in harmony with oneself and with others including nature. Respect for human rights, justice, tolerance, cooperation, social responsibility, respect for cultural diversity, firm commitment to democracy and non-violent conflict resolution have been identified as “hall marks of education for peace” (NCF 2005, page 62).

Education for peace as visualized and promoted by NCF (2005) aims at developing a rational, reflective and mature individual who is conscious of his/her own rights as well as the rights of others and his/her own duty towards others. In fact, education for peace has been considered as the bridge that facilitates communication between people and enables them to enjoy their rights without impinging the rights of others. The constructivist approach advocated by NCF (2005) provides ample scope and opportunity for promoting the culture of respect for human rights and peace as it calls for honoring the personal experiences of students and treating it as a base for dialogue and new learning. Education for peace and human rights emphasizes the skills of active listening, critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution, which are also the thrust of constructivist way of learning under NCF (2005). Both constructivism and human rights education are based on humanistic philosophy, which is dedicated to developing mature and self-directed students, and emphasize continuing and lifelong learning.

It is pertinent to clarify here that though in recent reforms major shift is visible in the overall approach of pedagogy of education from the behaviorist to constructivist and humanistic philosophy, the basic principle towards promoting human rights through integrated approach has remained unchanged. Therefore issues, concerns, and values addressing human rights

have been integrated across the entire school activities – both curricular and co-curricular, classroom environment, school management, teacher-pupil relationship, and teaching-learning process, etc. Teachers continue to occupy the central role in the whole teaching-learning process in the context of generating human rights awareness among students, though their role has been significantly transformed from mere transmitter of knowledge to facilitator of conditions that promote the process of knowledge construction.

### **Teachers and human rights education in India**

As indicated earlier, the Indian education system relies heavily on its teachers who are central to the process of teaching and learning. The country has more than five million teachers working at different levels of school education and an equally huge network of teacher education institutions to meet the needs of teacher preparation for the country. These include five hundred District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), eighty-seven Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs), seventy-three Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs), more than 2,200 primary and secondary teacher education institutions, and approximately two hundred fifty university departments of education. The Curriculum Framework prescribed for various teacher preparation programs of the country promotes the inclusion of themes related to various human rights that the teachers are expected to integrate at the school level. For instance, the 1998 Framework of Teacher Education Curriculum developed by the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) is anchored firmly on the view that the teachers themselves should internalize the values of justice, liberty, equality and secularism so that they can interpret them effectively to the students. It strongly believes that the education of teachers should equip

them with competencies needed to deal with discrimination, disparities, inequalities, etc. Consequently, it spells out certain competencies, commitments, and performance areas for the teachers to achieve that help them develop a humanistic perspective that is necessary in promoting consciousness towards human rights and their practice inside classroom. The vision of teacher education under the NCF (2005) is that the teacher education programs prepare the teachers for the role of being an “encouraging, supportive and humane facilitator in teaching-learning situations to enable learners to discover their talents, realize their physical and intellectual potentialities to the fullest, and to develop character and desirable social and human values to function as responsible citizens.” (page 107)

The cultural and religious diversities of Indian classrooms make the tasks of teachers quite challenging for they do not only have to be acquainted with the religious and social diversities but also promote equality, justice, and fraternity through their activities. NCF (2005) expects the teachers to be “sensitive to the social, professional and administrative contexts in which they need to operate.” (page 108) The curriculum planners tried to handle this challenge to a considerable extent by introducing themes on human rights and duties, values and their broad features, perspectives on educational, social, economic and political development in the country, etc. It also addresses issues like secularism, democracy, socialism, social and cultural traditions of India, issues of discrimination, caste, class, gender, religion, and rural-urban stratification in the country with the objective of enabling prospective teachers to understand and internalize the expectations of society from them vis-à-vis their own roles.

As the result of the global challenges and the pressures on teacher education programs to prepare teachers to meet these challenges, a more focused attempt in recent past has been made to incorporate issues like human rights, peace education, international education, India’s

role in non-aligned movement, regional cooperation, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), nuclear arms race, disarmament, emerging international economic order, globalization, environmental pollution and conservation and sustainable development, etc. in pre-service teacher education curriculums. These issues now find place in almost all teacher education programs at the primary and secondary levels as well as in the Master in Education courses.

This brief description of teacher education curriculums in India suggests that Indian teachers are expected to be well-equipped with the 3As (*Awareness, Analysis and Action*) of human rights once they come out of teacher education institutions and have the necessary skills to identify and translate into action the values and concerns related to human rights hidden in the text using the integration approach.

But are they actually aware of the human rights issues and equipped to practice human rights in classroom situations? The growing incidence of violation of the rights of children by the teachers themselves in the form of caste/class/religion-based discrimination, corporal punishment, and even violation of the **modesty** of children, etc. is a cause of serious concern for all education officials, and calls for some urgent remedial measures. Ironically, hardly any study has been conducted in the country to ascertain the basic awareness level of teachers about human rights, who are supposed to practice them inside their classrooms. Recently, though, some scholars doing doctorate courses show some interest on this very crucial issue. This study is an attempt at measuring the awareness of teachers of various issues and concepts related to human rights.

### **Methodology of the study**

The survey was administered on a sample of sixty-four teachers and teacher educators working at different levels of school education.

A Human Rights Awareness Questionnaire (HRAQ) developed by the investigator was used for data collection. The HRAQ consists of thirteen items, with two open-ended items (respondent writes his/her own answer) while the rest of the items were multiple-choice type (respondent chooses the correct alternative). The questionnaire covers basic issues such as the concept of human rights, articles in UDHR, the day which is celebrated as International Human Rights Day, articles in the Indian Constitution which include human rights, fundamental rights and fundamental duties of Indian citizens, and special implementation procedures of the United Nations agencies, etc. Since all items in the questionnaire were selected from primary-level textbooks, it was expected that all teachers have some awareness of issues related to human rights education that have been integrated in all levels of school education as well as teacher education programs. The sample included forty-six male and eighteen female teachers with teaching experiences ranging from one year to more than twenty-five years. Incidental sampling technique was followed and teachers attending the in-service programs of NCERT were selected as sample for the survey.

### **Analysis of Data and Results**

The study included a very heterogeneous group of teachers in terms of age, teaching experience, and school level assigned to them. A scrutiny of their demographic profile reveals that the age of respondents varied from 27 years to 56 years, the latter being at the far end of their career in the teaching profession. Understandably, their teaching experiences also varied from a minimum of one year to a maximum of thirty-eight years. Of the total sample of sixty-four teachers and teacher educators, nineteen teachers taught primary classes, twenty-six teachers taught secondary classes and sixteen teachers taught at teacher education institutions. Three respondents did not furnish any specific

information about the classes they were teaching. Majority of respondents (forty-eight out of sixty-four) have post-graduate qualification, while fourteen respondents have graduation degree, and the rest have +2 qualification, i.e., they have twelve years of higher secondary education.

The scoring procedure followed in the questionnaire was 1 for correct alternative and 0 for incorrect alternative. The responses had been analyzed both by item and total scores in order to know the extent of awareness of teachers. The frequency distribution of total scores obtained by respondents on the HRAQ indicates that majority of the respondents (30) scored between 0-29, twenty-five respondents scored between 30-39, while only nine respondents scored above this average (49-69). The human rights awareness curve of the scores of respondents is presented below.

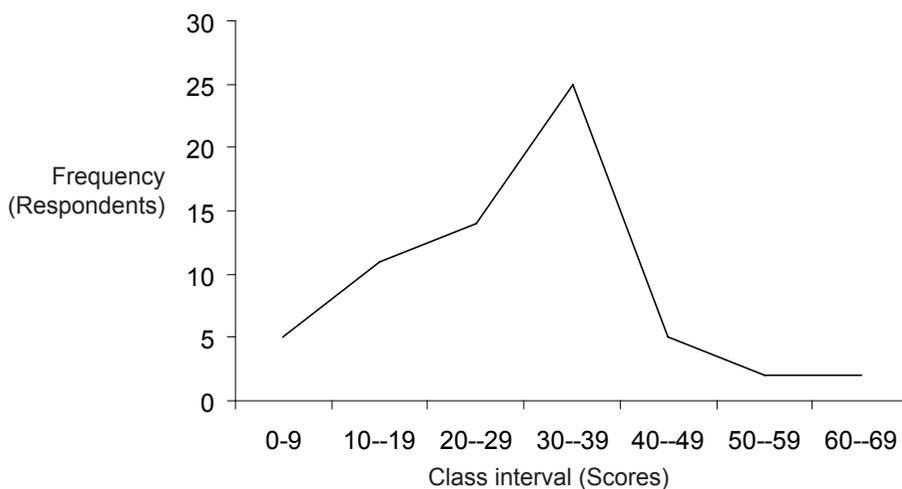
The graph indicates the level of human rights awareness of the respondents. The skewed picture of the awareness curve is indicative enough that majority of teachers are not well aware of the basic issues related to human

rights, which they are expected to promote in their classrooms.

This finding has been further strengthened by the analysis of the respondents' answers to open-ended questions. In one question that was meant to elicit their understanding of the concept of human rights one teacher replied that "These are the rights of human beings to live in a protected and secured society", another teacher said it is the "right to live with dignity and use all powers of the world" and yet another teacher felt human rights means "equal rights for all." A few other responses are presented below:

- "Teaching all people alike without any discrimination of caste, colour, race, sex, etc."
- "Fundamental rights of human being."
- "Right to live with peace and justice."
- "Rules and regulations meant for people"
- "Practicing one's right without hurting other's rights"
- "Live with nature"
- "Dignity of people"
- "Live and let live"
- "Right for humanization"

**Graph 1: Human Rights Awareness Curve**



“Fundamental rights provided by the Indian Constitution”

“Freedom of speech, to live and move [in] any part of the country.”

These responses suggest that a) teachers have a vague idea of human rights and lack the conceptual clarity which would help them to clearly and unambiguously explain human rights, b) some teachers have equated human rights with the fundamental rights provided in the Indian Constitution, c) others have equated it with peaceful co-existence, d) still others felt that it means following social norms. 15% of the respondents did not reply to this item at all.

The other open-ended question was meant to elicit the awareness of respondents about the International Human Rights Day and the date of its observance. 25% of the respondents did not have any idea about the day, although this International Human Rights Day is observed every year in majority of the schools of the country, with a number of activities being organized. 34% of the respondents did not respond to this question. Therefore almost 50% of the respondents seem to be unaware of International Human Rights Day and its relevance to the society.

A few items relate to the provisions of UDHR, which are included in the primary-level Social Science textbooks of Indian schools. The responses reveal that only 11% of the respondents were aware of the various articles of the UDHR, while 24% knew Article 26 of UDHR (right to education). Incidentally this article has been frequently referred to in the recent debate in the country on whether to make education a fundamental right of the child or not, and also all the teacher training programs (pre-service as well as in-service) have themes on free and compulsory education wherein it is customary to refer to Article 26 of UDHR from where the concept was drawn out by the framers of the Indian Constitution.

Similarly only 42% of the respondents indicated awareness of the fundamental rights

they enjoy in the Constitution, and sixty-two percent expressed their ignorance about their fundamental duties. It is pertinent to note that the Indian society has always been considered as duty-based society and the 42nd constitutional amendment of 1976 recognized it by including an article on fundamental duties (Article 51A), in Part IV of the Constitution of India. To make teachers and students become aware of these duties, they are published in the title page of all school textbooks. The states are also entrusted with the responsibility to educate the citizens on Fundamental Duties so that a proper balance between rights and duties may emerge. However, the findings of the study suggest that the efforts made so far are insufficient to make teachers become aware of their rights and duties, and teacher educators themselves appear to be ignorant about crucial issues and concepts related to human rights and duties which they are expected to promote and practice in their day-to-day classroom teaching.

Majority (70%) of the sampled teachers also lacked awareness about the existence of Human Rights Protection Act in India, and the principle of peaceful co-existence practiced and popularized in the form of “Panchsheel”.<sup>1</sup> 54% of all the respondents did not answer the related item asking what Panchsheel means [The principle of Panchsheel is related to: a) serving humanity; b) peaceful coexistence; c) women empowerment; d) children’s rights - with “b) peaceful coexistence” as the correct choice], and of those who answered the item 26% gave incorrect answers.

## Conclusion

The analysis of data resulted in very interesting conclusions. It is noteworthy to clarify here that the results obtained have very limited generalization capacity due to limited number of teachers and teacher educators included in the study, and also because any generalization needs the rigor of tool construction and sample

selection. The study did not follow these requirements since the objective of the study was to conduct a quick survey of the awareness level of those who are considered to be the facilitators of human rights in their classrooms. The study, however, has succeeded to a considerable extent in achieving this objective as it has been found that teachers generally lack the awareness of even basic human rights concepts, which are integrated in various textbooks of the primary schools of the country, and also taught in the teacher education institutions. The findings also suggest that the present integrated model of providing human rights education has not fully succeeded in equipping the teachers with awareness and pedagogical skills to identify the hidden agenda of the curriculum and bring it to the surface, or positively interpret various issues of the school syllabus to promote human rights among students. Similar results have been obtained by a survey conducted by the Peter D. Hart Research Associates in 1997 as part of Human Rights USA project. The results of this study suggest that less than 8% of the adults and 4% of the young people in the USA are aware of and can name the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>ii</sup>

Since teachers lack the knowledge of basic 'A' of human rights (i.e. Awareness) they cannot be expected to practice the other two 'As' (Analysis and Action). Consequently, instead of becoming the promoter of human rights they often become perpetrators of injustice and inequality. Therefore, the current model of human rights education does not seem to yield desired results and the pedagogical approach needs to be changed from integrated model to a combination of multiple models and approaches in order to empower teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to promote respect for the basic rights of individuals.

Teachers need to be prepared through pre-service and continuous in-service teacher education programs on the skills of analyzing the forces that violate the rights of individuals and be trained on relevant pedagogical techniques

to utilize multiple models and transactional strategies in their classrooms for effective human rights education.

In-service teacher education programs exclusively focused on human rights education and its transactional modalities are urgently required to create necessary awareness and develop skills required by the teachers to ensure human rights education in schools. To sum up, a more aggressive and effective human rights education program is necessary to ensure proper dissemination and education of human rights among teachers; to generate awareness among teachers about the concept and concerns related to human rights; and to equip them with the transactional skills to practice them within the four walls of classroom as well as in out-of-school activities.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Panchsheel or the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are part of the 1954 agreement between

India and the People's Republic of China. The five principles are:

- 1) Mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity
- 2) Mutual non-aggression
- 3) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs

4) Equality and Mutual Benefit

5) Peaceful co-existence.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Hart Research Associates, Inc., 1997, *Hart survey on attitudes and knowledge of human rights – Adults and Youth*. Available at [www.hrusa.org/features.shtm](http://www.hrusa.org/features.shtm) and [www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/youth-surv1.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/youth-surv1.htm)