

Human Rights Education At Elementary School Level

Paper ID

IJIFR/ V2/ E2/ 032

Page No

381-386

Subject Area

Education

Key Words

Human Rights Education, Undemocratic Attitude, Fundamental Freedom, Children Attitude, Early Childhood Development, Social Security

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Abstract

Human rights could be commonly defined as the rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. The violation of human rights especially of children is very much prevalent in country like India. Human rights education provides protection from discrimination, unfair treatment, undemocratic attitude, deterioration of cultural values, unawareness of society and environment, exploitation, bondage, human rights literacy, abuses of human rights at any level etc., as these are some of the factors which act as indicators of violation of human rights of adults in general and children in particular. From the child's early years, education for human rights is both practical as well as necessary. Pre-school and early elementary education can highlight a sense of common humanity among children. An important aim of education is to develop positive attitudes and values in children while they are young. Some of the factors help in the realization of human rights among children includes speech, reading story books, watching programmes on TV, listening the radio can be used as a means for developing international understanding. The study of different subjects at lower primary level like environmental studies and languages, and at upper primary level like social studies, sciences and languages will influence the mind of young children and help them in realizing the importance of each and every individual in the progress of society, in addition that they too have all kinds of rights to enjoy. Apart from all the above, the curricular activities which cut across subject areas may involve the whole school such as the observance of Human Rights Day and United Nations Day, school parliaments, debates, essay and poster competitions on major historical events or anniversaries of historical personalities connected with major social movements and variety of activities and programmes relating to specific issues such as environment, populations, literacy etc. drawing, completions depicting the violations of human rights in various life situations, preparing a list of very simple rules of classroom as well as safety rules to be followed in crossing streets, exhibitions and displays, projects, dramatic and literary activities may be organized to develop and promote an awareness about human rights among children. All the above activities may be organized under school club activities.

1 Introduction

Human Rights Defined

Human rights could be commonly defined as the rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. These are the minimal rights that every individual must have by virtue of his being a member of human family. Human rights, today, is rightly and universally regarded as a most fundamental value in life. The history of mankind proves that many persons died for it, killed for it, some desire for it, while others fear it. Human rights are as old as humanity itself, but human rights as a democratic society experiences today is the result of the evolution of human consciousness on the basis of the necessary demand for life based on equality, freedom and justice in a civilized society. Hence, human rights are the reflections of a civil society to protect and promote rule of law and human dignity. These are the claims of the individual for such conditions as are essential for the fullest realization of the innate characteristic which nature has bestowed him / her with as a human being. In other words, they imply that there are inherent and inalienable rights which are due to an individual by virtue of his / her being a human being and that they are necessary to ensure the dignity of every person as human being irrespective of one's race, religion, age, nationality language or any other factor. The knowledge and awareness of human rights is equally important in times of peace and war. The knowledge of human rights is essential as a tool for the observance and the promotion of human rights and also the creation of a climate of public opinion in which gross violations of human rights are unacceptable.

The denial of human rights and fundamental freedom not only is an individual and personal tragedy, but also creates conditions of social and political unrest, sowing the seeds of violence and conflict within and between societies and nations. Hence, there is an urgent need for human rights education for promoting international cooperation in economic, social, cultural, education and health fields and assisting in the realization of human rights and fundamental freedom for all without distinction race, sex, age, language or religion. The universal declaration of human rights states that education is directed to the full development of human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. Efforts must be made in this direction to make the students aware of a universal culture of human rights by imparting required knowledge and also by moulding attitude of the children.

Human Rights Education is a priority in that it contributes to a concept of development consistent with the dignity of the human person. Human rights education involves more than providing information to students. It is a comprehensive life long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies. The individuals, both adults and children, must come to know human rights as a comprehensive concept encompassing their civil, cultural, political and social rights. UNESCO International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy in Montreal in March 1993 adopted human rights as a precondition for constrainable development, the civil society and democracy. It was also accepted that human rights education provides protection from discrimination, unfair treatment, undemocratic attitude, deterioration of cultural values, unawareness of society and environment, exploitation, bondage, human rights literacy, abuses of human rights at any level etc., as these are some of the factors which act as indicators of violation of human rights of adults in general and children in particular. The violation of human rights especially of children in terms of the above is very much prevalent in country like India.

2 Who is a Child?

A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. He is educated in a society, through a society and for society. The nature of the society and the world for which the child is trained must be fully understood by those who are called upon to train him. In this connection, understanding the rights of the child is the first step in education. If the teacher has to help the child, make the right adjustment to the world in which he has to live, he must understand and respect the rights of the child. The child is not a piece of stone that cannot be carved into any shape nor is he a lump of clay that can be moulded into any form. He has his own dynamic nature of seeking satisfaction. Since he is a human being worthy of respect in his own right, the educationists and all those who deal with the child must understand what he wants and accordingly they must respect his rights.

The convention on the rights of the child, drafted by UN Commission of Human Rights, and adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20th November 1989, is a set of international standards and measures intended to protect and promote the well-being of children in society. The convention recognizes the exceptional vulnerability of children and proclaims that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. It is guided by the principle of a first call for children - a principle that the essential needs of children should be given highest priority in the allocation of resources at all times. It obligates the state so respect and ensure that children get a fair and equitable deal in society. It emphasizes the importance of the family and the need to create an environment that is conducive to the healthy growth and development of children. It advocates concerted public action by all individuals and agencies including Government as well as non-governmental, local, national, regional and international to promote the rights of the child. The convention, in a sense, is a means of empowering children and creating an environment in which all children are able to live securely and realize their full potential in life. The convention draws attention to four sets of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of every child. They are a) the right to survival which includes the right to life, the highest attainable standard of human health, nutrition, and adequate standards of living, name and nationality, b) the right to protection which includes freedom from all types of exploitation abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment, and neglect including the right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflicts, the right to development which includes the right to education, c), support for early childhood development and care, social security, and the right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities, and d) the right to participation which includes respect for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Convention states that the rights shall be extended to all children without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, nationality, color, sex, language, religion, nation, social origin, disability at birth and other status. The convention also draws particular attention to the fact that in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult circumstances, and that such children need special consideration. It advocates measures for the protection and harmonious development of the child that are consistent with the traditions and cultural values of different people. Convention also reaffirms a commitment to promote social progress that will ensure a better quality of life and greater freedom for people in general and children in particular. It also undergoes the importance and potential of international cooperation for promoting and improving the living conditions in every country.

In developing countries like India, millions of children become victims getting exploited by industrialists, politicians and owners etc. A great majority of such victims are considered are not even

as human beings. In such a situation, people who are aware of their rights stand best chance to protecting themselves. Convention on the rights of children [1998] emphasis that in all countries, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions who need special protection. Hence, it is imperative to create awareness on human rights of children. Learning about one's own rights builds respect for the rights of others and points the way to more tolerant and peaceful societies. Ignorance of one's own right leads a person to subjugation and deprivation. So it is essential to create awareness on human rights of children and such awareness creation is a part of the struggle to establish respect for human life, equally, freedom and human dignity.

Human Rights Education should take the lead to develop awareness among the people in general and children in particular who are going to be the future citizens of the country and builders of nation about human rights by teaching Indian cultural and educational heritage. Noted jurist former high commissioner for Britain L.M. Singhvi says "it was of utmost importance to inculcate greater awareness about Indian heritage and culture and introduce human rights as a subject in schools. The education systems must imbibe a feeling of Indians and greater appreciation of Indian history, culture and ethos. Students, to become good citizens, they have to be aware of their civil rights as well as duties. Moreover, human rights must be accompanied by human duties. Human duties fulfilled are human rights served. Further, it was also advocated the inclusion of human rights in school and college curricula to bring about greater awareness on the national and international levels. To develop this awareness message, human rights education should include topics like development of tolerance, sense of value judgment, development of democratic ideals, development of spirit of cooperation, propagation of the idea of non-violence among the people, and in calculation of idea of non-violence among people in general, and children in particular, at different levels of schooling. This will be of utmost importance especially at childhood age of children.

3 Human Rights Education at Elementary Level

From the child's early years, education for human rights is both practical as well as necessary. Pre-school and early elementary education can highlight a sense of common humanity among children. An important aim of education is to develop positive attitudes and values in children while they are young. Advances made in the psychology of learning and instruction have shown that it is possible to explore young children to these issues as part of their preparation for adulthood and future citizenship. In a country like India, it is all the more important to expose children to the concept of one world and human rights at this stage because many children do not go beyond the elementary level. It is important to have a properly developed programme for the students of the elementary stage. They are entering school for the first time and secondly, right at this stage they start developing broader perspectives because of being exposed to reading and interpersonal interaction. This in turn, brings numerous changes in their attitudes and behavior among children. While preparing a programme for the students at elementary level, their developmental characteristics should be taken into account. Aims, objectives, content and methods of teaching depend on these. Children at the elementary stage enjoy all sorts of activities which become a source of joy for them and they look forward to doing it.

4. Factors Help in the Realization of Human Rights among Children

Speech becomes an important tool for group interaction and for sharing experiences. There is also a shift from ego-centric to socially-oriented speech. This is the time when concept of right and wrong and new standards of morality take shape. Once these concepts are internalized, they can be applied

to a broader variety of situations. Little older children in the elementary school develop interest in reading story books, especially books which have many illustrations, stories about heroes and heroines, and stories from mythology, especially Ramayana and Mahabharata. They like to watch programmes on TV and like to hear the radio too. All these can be used as a means for developing international understanding. They can also be helped to develop positive attitudes towards their own group and people who are culturally different from themselves. But the teacher has to be very careful at this stage and should enable the child to develop healthy attitudes as free as possible from prejudices.

Respect for each child, different opinions or tastes; self-observation / self-check; demonstration of pictures in books and on the walls highlighting the importance and contribution of each individual child or adult in the progress and prosperity of the society, etc., enable the children to soon know that each person, child or adult, is important, needs to be respected and has rights.

The study of different subjects at lower primary level like environmental studies and languages, and at upper primary level like social studies, sciences and languages will influence the mind of young children and help them in realizing the importance of each and every individual in the progress of society, in addition that they too have all kinds of rights to enjoy. The study of history develop the knowledge and respect for the diversity and variety in the ethnic composition and culture, language, religion, customs and ways of living in India and the world; knowledge about men and women from different places through the ages who have struggled for justice, human brotherhood and human equality; an understanding of the vision of independent India as it evolved during the struggle for freedom; promote a general understanding of national goals and main features of fundamental rights, directive principles and fundamental duties; promote concern about deprivation, poverty, disease, illiteracy and inequalities; and develop knowledge and concern about the environment and its degradation; promotes appreciation for India's cultural heritage, its composite nature, richness on well as variety.

The study of different subjects like history and civics develop an understanding of the struggle for freedom, natural integration, values of democracy, socialism, secularism, justice, equality and fundamental rights, directive principles and fundamental duties which have been enshrined in the Indian constitution. The study of languages develop in the children the ability to communicate clearly the ideals, opinions and arguments and participate in citizenship action at their own level as well as help change the attitude of children so that they develop an attitude of acceptance of other children from different ethnic groups and tolerance of difference in opinion, beliefs and customs. The study of science at elementary level inculcate natural outlook and there by help in critical observation and promote understanding of the process and problems of areas related to agriculture, health and nutrition, environmental protection, energy and material resources and more importantly develop a scientific attitude to live more effectively as a responsible person. Apart from all the above, the curricular activities which cut across subject areas may involve the whole school such as the observance of Human Rights Day and United Nations Day, school parliaments, debates, essay and poster competitions on major historical events or anniversaries of historical personalities connected with major social movements and variety of activities and programmes relating to specific issues such as environment, populations, literacy etc. drawing, completions depicting the violations of human rights in various life situations, preparing a list of very simple rules of classroom as well as safety rules to be followed in crossing streets, exhibitions and displays, projects, dramatic and literary activities may be organized to develop and promote an awareness about human rights among children. All the above activities may be organized under school club activities.

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