

## Curriculum Based Vs Transformative Human Rights Education - Expectations and Challenges

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**Abstract:** Human rights are the 'basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled'. The UN defines Human Rights identifying various factors like human freedom, equality, dignity, security and right to life. Down through the human history, human rights were understood from various dimensions and perspectives. This study explores the current scenario of HRE in higher education in India; mainly, how the teachers and students of selected colleges perceive and expect HRE to be and, the challenges in implementing an effective HRE.

**Keywords:** Human rights, HE in India, HRE (Human Rights Education), transformative HRE, Model curriculum of HRE, Delphi method.

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### INTRODUCTION AND THE PROBLEM

Human rights are the 'basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled'. The UN defines Human Rights identifying various factors like human freedom, equality, dignity, security and right to life [1]. Down through the human history, human rights were understood from various dimensions and perspectives. Aristotle understood human rights on a moral, religious or biological survival need more than traditions and cultural norms. Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher explains human rights as a social contract in which individuals in a society agree for the sake of the common good sacrificing personal liberties. The ethics of reciprocity, the popularly quoted dictum on human rights highlights reciprocal recognition and respect of rights in order that one's own rights will be protected.

The human rights situation in India is complex, emanating from various religious, socio-cultural, historical political systems of the past. The ancient Indian religious-philosophical systems, the subsequent Muslim invasions and further, the influence of colonial rulers of Europe and British Raj in specific, ushered the Indian society to a peculiar predicament. These caused regular paradigm shifts and generated a complex Indian Psyche that floats in the glories of the past, struggles in the present to identify with the current world scenario [2].

The covert and overt human rights abuses in India are primarily seen in the name of caste, creed, and language; the anarchy of the police, politicians and the

powerful; abuse of women in families and workplaces; abuse and exploitation of poor labourers and helpless people. These are often overlooked by the general population as part of daily living whereas human rights watchdogs in and abroad outcry as serious offences. Primarily, the general population does not have awareness and, not knowing their own rights fail to react. Therefore they are easily exploited. In this pathetic Indian context, human rights education is the need of the day to give awareness in order to reduce violations, crimes, and abuses.

Human rights education (HRE) is an emerging trend all over the world suggested by the UN. In the Indian scenario, HRE is highly recommended by UGC and other government bodies, however lacking in all levels of education. Since people are not aware of their own basic rights, abuses are prevalent in every sector of the society. Therefore, education and teaching can, to a greater extent bridge the gap between an abstract human rights value system and a people's conscience and action [3]. According to Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of UN, "Human rights education is more than a lesson in schools or a thought for the day; rather it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity" [4].

HRE could be merely curriculum based or transformational and action oriented [5]. It is curriculum based when HRE is dealt at the cognitive level as historical treatise of social living. In this approach, different resolutions of various governments and concerned bodies are explained to the students to

create an awareness of their own rights and respect for other's rights. The same curriculum based knowledge could be imparted with a pinch of emotion in which actual human rights problems are highlighted in the curriculum and students are given awareness to protect human rights on the basis of the sympathy they create for the victims. On the contrary, a student-centred or action-oriented education trains the students to act and interact in a way, by which human rights violations are prevented, prohibited as well as brought to the notice of the law. This approach is transformative whereby the students are prepared to be agents of human rights. Curriculum based education can only give awareness, whereas transformational education encourage students for action [6].

### OBJECTIVES

This study explores the current scenario of HRE in higher education in India; mainly, how the teachers and students of selected colleges perceive and expect HRE to be and, the challenges in implementing an effective HRE. In view of this, this study is focused on the following questions:

1. What is the current status of Human Rights Education in India?
2. What are the expectations of teachers and students on Human Rights Education in higher education?
3. Which teaching modality - curriculum based or transformative, would be an effective Human Rights Education for the Indian scenario?
4. What are the challenges in implementing an effective Human Rights Education?

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative exploratory study used a case study method. The subjects of the study are undergraduate and postgraduate students and teachers of one college from Kerala and one from Tamil Nadu. Since the PG students of both the colleges come from various parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, were from different colleges, diversity was obtained in the data gathered.

Brainstorming method [7, 8] was used for students and Delphi debate [9] was conducted for the teachers. Brainstorming sessions were conducted in the following way. The Students were given orientation for 10 minutes about HRE. Just after that, they were given 15-20 minutes to express their personal opinions on specific questions. Twenty seven Brainstorming sessions were conducted and the total number of student participation was 542. Moderated by the authors, 12 Delphi debate sessions were conducted for a total number of 57 teachers. It was organized as a kind of controlled debate in which consensus was not expected from the teachers. Expertise in the field of teaching, knowledge, and cooperation of the participants was given high priority in collecting data for the prescribed

questions. The data from brainstorming and the Delphi interview provided enough material for data analysis. A theoretical editing and analysis were done to categorize and develop conceptual themes [10]. First, the researchers identified meaningful segments of text and organized them into patterns. Triangulation was done by analyzing and categorizing the data into provisional themes and categories. These themes and categories were subsequently re-examined and reorganized into smaller conceptual themes.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The subjects of the study, especially the postgraduate students and the teachers studied at different colleges and the results represent the scenario of HRE in many Indian colleges. Of the two colleges studied, one has HRE embedded in its curriculum for undergraduate courses which was initiated in recent past. This is given as one chapter in 'Values education and Human rights'. Some of the subjects have attended human rights certificate program at the undergraduate level or, a member of human rights associations in their undergraduate course in the respected colleges. However, the majority of the participants never had any course or background knowledge about human rights.

Current scenario of HRE: Currently, only a few colleges offer HRE, and it is not made mandatory. The subjects who did not undergo any HR program feel that they missed something in their lives. Even those who had one or other HRE lamented that the course is given as a ritual and the lessons are not up to the mark. Some opined about the courses being offered as - something is better than nothing situation. These clearly show that the students are not benefitted out of the current inadequately organized HRE schemes. The teachers are not qualified to teach human rights, do not have proper orientation and preparations to offer the courses. The topics are not contextualised and current issues are not discussed in the classrooms. Overall, the current HRE lacks focus and creative action oriented dimension.

#### *Perceptions and Expectations*

The students and teachers perceive that basic HRE should be given at high school and +2 levels. This will enable the students to know their basic rights that will lay the foundation for their social awakening and orientation. In the college level, more practical, action-oriented courses could be presented that would transform the students into agents of human rights in the society. A few of the subjects are of the opinion that HRE is a waste of time in the current Indian scenario due to the fact that most of the human right violators and abusers are civil servants, politicians and lawmakers. This pessimism of the subjects reflects the dismal nature of human rights situation in India and the

frustration of the public in managing the plenteous abuses in the society.

As per the expectations, a vast majority of the subjects emphasize a contextualized syllabus that focuses on the local abuses and violations. HRE need to be interactive and experiential so that younger generation is given proper awareness, guidance, and preparation to work for a better society. The students are enthusiastic that if proper guidance is given, they

will be transformed into agents of human rights, that in return will pave the way, in the long run, for reduced violations and abuses. The subjects view that UGC and other top governing bodies of higher education should sponsor HRE in the form of action groups like NSS and NCC. The subjects also expect that the situation could be changed if the top governing bodies make HRE mandatory with qualified HR trainers as a requirement for the accreditation process.

**Table 1: Showing evolved themes and categories**

SL No	Questions	Conceptual Themes and categories
1	➤ Do you think HRE should be given in colleges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ It should be given and it is the need of the day</li> <li>✓ We can at least know our rights</li> <li>✓ In the current Indian scenario it is a waste of time</li> <li>✓ HRE could be started in the high school and +2 level</li> </ul>
2	➤ How do you assess the current HRE in colleges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No HRE in colleges</li> <li>✓ Given as certificate course</li> <li>✓ Just an association activity but some awareness given</li> <li>✓ It is given but as ritual by non-qualified teachers</li> <li>✓ Current lessons are not up to the mark</li> <li>✓ What I get is, something is better than nothing situation</li> </ul>
3	➤ What are the drawbacks of current HRE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ It is dogmatic and not practical oriented</li> <li>✓ Does not touch our lives</li> <li>✓ No qualified teachers, not able to immerse into the topic</li> <li>✓ Teachers do not have adequate preparation to teach</li> <li>✓ Not contextualized; Current issues not discussed</li> </ul>
4	➤ How HRE could be given in the colleges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Need to be interactive, experiential and action oriented</li> <li>✓ Practical knowledge should be given inviting people who are involved in Human Rights activities</li> <li>✓ Multimedia classes with concrete issues</li> <li>✓ Local HR abuses and issues need to be given priority</li> </ul>
5	➤ What are your expectations from HRE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Basic rights should be taught in the school level and action oriented training in the college level</li> <li>✓ If appropriately given, students will be aware of their basic rights and work for a better society</li> <li>✓ We can become agents of human rights in the society</li> <li>✓ In the long run, human rights abuses can be reduced</li> </ul>
6	➤ What are the challenges to offer an effective HRE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Serious and rigorous planning is needed in the top level</li> <li>✓ Curriculum need to be structured as well as flexible</li> <li>✓ More ear-marked funding from Government</li> <li>✓ Preparation of contextual action oriented syllabus</li> <li>✓ Preparation and appointment of qualified teachers</li> <li>✓ Not all students will be interested</li> </ul>
7	➤ Other suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Like NSS and NCC, government should sponsor human rights groups in all colleges</li> <li>✓ It should be made mandatory for NAAC and other accreditations</li> <li>✓ Like placement and Career guidance, it should become mandatory with separate cells with qualified people</li> </ul>

**Challenges for HRE in India**

Based on the recommendations, suggestions and the collective analysis of all the answers, the authors identify the following challenges in improving

and implementing an effective HRE in the higher education sectors.

- Rigorous planning at the top levels of higher education bureau
- Adequate funding from government bodies

- Appointing properly qualified teachers for all the colleges
- Formulating a flexible, contextualized syllabus aiming at transformation
- Managing indifference and negligence in implementing a mandatory HRE from the part of the students and colleges

From the gathered data and the inferences made by the researchers, the following model curriculum is suggested.

### Transformative HRE Model

In order to bring a desirable change through HRE, the authors propose a three-phase HRE model. This model is planned with immediate as well as far-reaching goals. The immediate goal would be transforming students into agents of human rights. The Far reaching goal would be improving the human rights culture of the people.

**Table2: Transformative HRE Model**

Transformative Human Rights Education		
Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Awareness and Competency Rising	Internalization and Transformation	Action Orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theoretical Awareness</li> <li>• Inequalities in power and justice</li> <li>• Current issues</li> <li>• Contextual violations, abuses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth analysis of political/social environment in which violations take place</li> <li>• Past/current issues with media presentations</li> <li>• Case analysis</li> <li>• First hand information from activists/ victims by means of seminars and conferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness rallies</li> <li>• Collaboration with different HR agents</li> <li>• Fieldworks to create awareness among public</li> <li>• Fieldwork to meet victims and places of abuses</li> </ul>

In the first phase of HRE, the main focus is laid on awareness and competency rising. Here, a theoretical background is given together with contextualized issues. As Teleki [11] points out in preparing an agenda for UN human rights education policy, ‘failure to link human rights issues to the local context clearly weaken the program’s effectiveness’. Therefore, local contextual violations, abuses, and issues should be given in the first place together with theories to create awareness.

In the second phase, applications of theories are given priority. Any training program loses its credibility if disconnected from theory and practice. The application is more focused on internalization of the issues and the problems related to day to day violations and abuses. A Clear picture of abuses is shown via multimedia to make the students empathize with the victims. It is only through empathy, action orientation will develop [12].

Phase three of the HRE is action-oriented training. Here, the students will be open to opportunities to participate and demonstrate against human rights violations and abuses and, they are put into action by various means. Asking the students to organize a rally on world human rights day would be a simple example. Field trips to places of abuse, creating awareness in their neighbourhood, nearby schools and villages are other activities that will transform the budding personalities into zealous proponents of human rights.

### CONCLUSION

United Nations defines HRE as a strategy to prevent human rights violations and to foster respect for human beings so that people can live in freedom and dignity. The study identified the current murky curriculum based HRE and the dismal status. However, the perceptions and expectations of students and teachers are very high. The study also identified few hardships that the higher education authorities need to face in implementing an effective HRE in colleges. Based on the findings, the authors proposed a three phase Transformative HRE Model that would transform students into agents of human rights in our society.

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