



Human Rights Education Program in Karnataka

by Joe Rosario

Mithra Foundation is an independent and voluntary organization working among the migrant population living in the slums and pavements in and around Bangalore city in South India. Its aim is to empower children and women that they would regain and secure better socio-economic status in their households and in society at large. The organization was started in 1992 by a team of mental health professionals, development workers and activists. Presently it covers seven slums with a population of around 30,000. The focus groups are those who are most vulnerable due to caste, economic status and gender discrimination.

Susila Dharma International Association (SDIA) works to relieve human suffering and promote just and sustainable development by partnering with and supporting grassroots, participatory development and humanitarian initiatives; empowering individuals and communities to engage in positive human, social and economic change; and raising awareness of global issues and inter-dependence.

SDIA, a network of members and projects in more than 30 countries, is an affiliate organization of the World Subud Association. SDIA maintains consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

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The **Human Rights Program** trains new teachers in human rights education and also gives refresher courses for teachers who have already undergone training earlier. These trainings are conducted at the beginning of the academic year at different regions in the state where teachers from that particular region participate. They are intensive trainings lasting two to three days. Apart from our own resource people, other professionals are also involved in conducting these trainings. Topics covered include: general introduction to human rights, human rights perspective within national and international scenarios, the importance and relevance of human rights in our present day context, various [legal] instruments of human rights, different commissions, agencies, and help lines that protect human rights, different types of rights, legal aspects, gender, methodology of conducting human rights education, strategies to address human rights violations, etc.

Teachers who have undergone the training conduct weekly classes (two periods each week) using the textbook prepared by Mithra. The textbook consists of two parts. The first part of the book is the foundation for attitudinal change which includes general orientation to basic human rights. It also includes how certain negative attitudes and actions can destroy the human society. The second part of the book deals with specific issues of violations. In our society the most vulnerable groups whose rights are violated are women, children, and Dalits. Hence, violations specific to these groups are dealt with. The lessons are meant to help the teachers and students form right attitudes and make right judgments. The text also includes many interesting activities that can be done both in the school and at home. These activities are meant to provide opportunities for students to practice the basic values.

Apart from the regular classes, we also organize inter-school competitions related to human rights themes. Competitions in essay writing, drawing, elocution, drama, etc. are conducted during the course of the year and prizes are given to the winners.

At the end of each academic year we administer a questionnaire to the students to assess the attitudinal change in them due to human rights education.



The program is monitored through school visits, contacts with principals, teachers and students of human rights education. Every year Mithra conducts an impact study of the program with the help of external evaluators.

The Human Rights Program promotes and protects human rights by creating awareness and sensitizing the student community and the teachers. The fruits of this will definitely penetrate into the families and to the neighborhoods of the students. The newly created awareness which children gain from Human Rights education classes make them question and challenge their family members and others in the neighborhood, when Human rights violations take place. However, we perceive this as a positive result of the program. Only such challenges can bring about social transformation.

Background

In 1997 Mithra initiated a human rights education program for High School students in Karnataka, South India. From a small beginning with just five city schools in Bangalore, today the program covers nearly 200 schools in 12 different districts in the state.

Human rights education is imparted to high school students of classes eight and nine only. At the moment, a total of nearly fifty thousand students from different schools are receiving this education and contributing their mite in social transformation. Over the years we have trained more than nine hundred teachers from different schools in human rights education. Apart from the weekly classes of human rights with the help of the textbook prepared by Mithra, students are also encouraged to organize various other events related to the theme such as painting competition, essay writing, elocution, skits, etc.

Other professionals and trainers assist the program team of Mithra. A broad-based advisory committee has been formed to oversee



the program and to lend the team's support to implement Human Rights Education.

The goal of human rights education:

The main goal of human rights education is to sensitize the younger generation by imparting a basic knowledge of human rights and instilling in them the values of human rights so that in future our society will become more humane. Other objectives are:

- To impart knowledge about human rights as found in the Indian Constitution and in the UN Charter of Human Rights so that they will grow as enlightened citizens.
- To impart human rights education to the young so

that they will grow as human beings with much sensitivity to their own human rights as well as those of others.

- To help the younger generation in their growth as women and men look out for others in the context of human rights violations against children, women, tribal people, Dalits, refugees and the environment.

- To spread the culture and ethos of human rights in the children's schools and in their surroundings.

- To widen the perspective and scope of functioning of schools by networking with organizations and institutions



that are involved in social transformation and development.

- To take up advocacy work so that the state government will make this subject a regular and mandatory part of the curriculum in all schools.

Other short and long term objectives of the program can be summarized as follows:

- To promote human rights culture in the student community;
- To encourage children to become aware of their rights as well as the rights of others;
- To sensitize the families and neighbors of students about human rights;
- To enhance understanding of the concept of human rights;
- To highlight human rights violations and to encourage debate and discussion;
- To bring students knowledge of national and international instruments of human rights that have been gained;
- To listen to and validate children's reaction to human rights violations and their response to the situation;
- To help teacher gain knowledge and become sensitized so that they can promote human rights culture;
- To encourage human rights teachers to provide moral support to students and to their families

The ultimate goal of the program is to create a society in which every human being can live with dignity and without fear. Though this may take time we are confident that the children who undergo human rights education will be instrumental in bringing about social transformation in the society.

Implementation

Activities:

- Contacting the Principals of the schools to brief them about the human rights education program;
- Identifying potential teachers of human rights;
- Organizing trainings for the teachers;

- Supplying books on human rights;
- School visits for monitoring;
- Organizing essays, drawing, skits, elocution, etc. related to human rights;
- Annual celebration of International Human Rights Day;
- Annual impact study and evaluation.

Mithra is the only NGO involved in promoting human rights education at the high school level in the state of Karnataka. It is also one of the few NGOs that work on human rights issues in South India. Mithra's ambition is to create a cadre of human rights activists in the civil society. By imparting human rights education, Mithra aims to develop a large number of human rights nurseries in different schools in the state. During the course of two years (class 8th and 9th) we develop these nurseries so that they can be implanted in various places to grow and bear fruit.

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