

Human Rights Education and Realisation in India: A Case Study of NGOs

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Abstract

India being a developing country, is confronting multiple social problems every day. Some of them are quiet common while comparing with other countries. Most of them are very specific to this sub continent due to the social structure, geographical locations. When we try to diagnose all these problems through human rights perspective, then those social problems become human rights issues. Even though the state agencies are trying hard to provide viable solutions to those human rights issues in a sustainable manner, the result of those efforts are not so successful due to various obvious reasons such as social structure, lack of capital resources, corruption, etc., In this context, the role of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) become highly relevant to spread human rights education and sensitise the people to achieve a long time solution to all existing human right issues. It would be hectic task for a researcher to examine all NGOs and their valuable contributions for creating human rights awareness and sensitisation of people to understand their rights. This paper will focus on few identified NGOs and their role in promoting human rights. Positions prior to their interventions to the human rights issues and after that would be examined. Main objective of this paper is to examine the role of non state actors in changing the legal and social dimensions of human rights issues. Therefore, this paper will study the NGOs involved in sensitising Manual Scavengers with the help of some case study

Keywords: Human Rights, Human Right Education, NGOs & Human Rights

Introduction

Human rights education is the foremost step to make the people to realise about their inalienable rights and to sensitize on the same.¹

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Spreading of human rights awareness among the people is state's obligation which is a mandate under the UDHR.² If the State organs are the violators of the human rights, then the solution is to approach the High Court or the Apex Court to get justice.³ For approaching the Courts, how many of the people or victims of the human rights violations know these remedies. In some of the worst cases, victims do not realise that they are deprived of human rights and their dignity is affected. Even they realise that they are victimised, factors like poverty, social stigma, etc., do not allow them to get rid of those practises⁴. In this context, with the absence of effective remedial mechanisms, NGOs play a vital role in educating the people about their rights and spread awareness⁵. Human rights problems are having different dimensions and varying from State to State. Due to geographical locations, socio, economic and political circumstances of the State are the key factors in human rights violation.

India being a developing country, is confronting multiple social problems every day. Some of them are quiet common while comparing with other countries⁶. Most of them are very specific to this sub

¹ For the detailed discussion about the evolutions and the strategies adopted for spreading human rights education, please see, George J. Andreopoulos, Richard Pierre Claude, *Human Rights Education for the Twenty-First Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, (1997) and Richard Pierre Claude, *Human Rights Education in the Philippines*, Kalikasan Press. (1991).

² From the Preamble of the UDHR, it is very much obvious that states are having an obligation to promote human rights. The same portion is extracted here. "UDHR, Preamble THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction". The same is available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#ap> Last visited on 3rd December, 2014. Even by interpreting Article 30 of the UDHR, 1948, it may be well stated that State has an obligation to ensure not to restrict the rights.

³ In India, most of the UDHR Rights are part of the fundamental rights. Therefore, violations of fundamental rights are provided with constitutional remedies. These remedies are available either under Art.32 or Art. 226.

⁴ For the detailed discussion on the nexus between poverty and human rights please see, OLM Ferraz, "Poverty and Human Rights", *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 2008 28 (3) 583-603.

⁵ For understanding various human rights issues in India, please see, Asish Kumar Das, Prasant Kumar Mohanty, *Human Rights in India*, Sarup & Sons, (2007)

⁶ *Ibid.*,

continent due to the social structure, geographical locations. When we try to diagnose all these problems through human rights perspective, then those social problems become human rights issues. Even though the state agencies are trying hard to provide viable solutions to those human rights issues in a sustainable manner, the result of those efforts are not so successful due to various obvious reasons such as social structure, lack of capital resources, corruption, etc.,⁷ In this context, the role of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) become highly relevant to spread human rights education and sensitise the people to achieve a long time solution to all existing human right issues. This research paper is aimed to analyse the contribution of Sulabh International⁸ which is pioneer in the field of sanitation, manual scavenging and caste related issues.

Sulabh: A Social Doctor

Sulabh was founded as an international social service organisation by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak in 1970. From its very inception, it has adopted the Gandhian philosophy so as to sensitise the people about their rights and helping them to get liberated so as to come out from the grave social sin. Sulabh focal point can be divided into 5 folds which are as follows:

- Removal of untouchability and social discrimination
- Removal of untouchability and social discrimination against human scavengers
- To develop/innovate cost effective toilet system to be adopted by all sections of the people
- To provide rehabilitation assistance so as to remove the social stigma to scavengers
- To educate the common man about the social evil

From the above points, it is highly possible to have a preliminary opinion on Sulabh that it is striving for eliminating and rehabilitating manual scavengers from the country. However, as per Sulabh, the five folds are:

⁷. See Manoj Kumar Sinha, *Implementation of Basic Human Rights*, Lexis Nexis (2013)

⁸. Sulabh is a NGO founded in 1970s. It was focusing on the State of Bihar at its first inception. Then it expanded its jurisdiction to all over the Country.

- Liberation
- Rehabilitation
- Vocational training
- Proper education of next generation
- Social elevation

Even though there are slight differences between the two groups, the core objects are one and same but the names are the different one. If these objectives are well experimented and achieved, then one has to realise the commitments of Sulabh for the social purification of human minds. Then it is worth to be called Sulabh as ‘a social doctor’. Sulabh has been recognised UN, WHO, many other international institutions including other governments too. In this context, it is worth to examine the following two important issues.

- How far Sulabh objectives are being achieved?
- Whether the solutions provided to the victims of the social injustice are in a sustainable model?

If the above issues are critically analysed, it may be possible to project the outcome of the Sulabh’s Human Rights Education and awareness creation. Let us examine the above issues with the help of a case study.

Human Rights Education for Peaceful Liberation: Alwar

Open defecation is one of the serious concerns which would cause many socio-health problems.⁹ However, dry latrine is most vulnerable than open defecation because cleaning of dry latrine has to be by human beings which is closely connected with caste factors.¹⁰ A group of people mostly from a few communities were deployed for removing night soil on head.¹¹ They were paid with fewer amounts even among

⁹. See for the detailed discussion on the nexus between health and open defecation, Bonita F. Stanton & John D. Clemens, “An Educational Intervention For Altering Water-Sanitation Behaviors To Reduce Childhood Diarrhea In Urban Bangladesh; A Randomized Trial To Assess The Impact Of The Intervention On Hygienic Behaviors And Rates Of Diarrhea”, *Am. J. Epidemiol.* (1987) 125 (2): 292-301.

¹⁰. See for detailed discussion on the history of the manual scavenging in India and caste factor, Srivastava, B.N. (1997). *Manual Scavenging in India: A Disgrace to the Country*. Concept Publishing Company (P) Ltd. p. 13.

¹¹. *Id.*, p.15

the lower caste communities, these people involved in scavenging were considered as untouchables among the untouchables¹².

Development may change the appearance of a state however; it does not change the mindset of the social animals. Even people deployed in scavenging wished to give up, the social stigma which continued with them did not pave for any employment. Social non acceptance of these untouchables among the untouchables and other sections of the people, forced them to revert back to scavenging due to starvation. When the Govt machineries were expected to prevent inhuman practices, they did not.

When law was about to fail in its all attempts, technology extended its support to remove these anti social in human practices. Sulabh's starting point is also with the technology. Though the human right education and sensitisation among the scavengers were from 1970s, the results became obvious only at the end of 1990s and the beginning of this century.

Alwar is one of the places where caste system had penetrated to its possible extend in the northern part of India. Due to this caste system, many were deployed for scavenging. Many grandmothers used to take their granddaughters to train them even though the latter did not appreciate the same. Efforts were made to eliminate them however it was not for providing rehabilitation which resulted in successful failure. Even when the rehabilitation was provided, the social stigma attached with them did not allow to be accepted by rest of the people.

After realising these problems, Sulabh rightly assisted and helped them to realise and to learn the self sustain model. In Alwar, considerable numbers of people were engaged in scavenging activity. Due to sulabh's continuous efforts, one group of people agreed to liberate at first in 2003 then followed by the second group in 2006. Both groups were provided with vocational training for their self sustain. At last, in 2008, the last group had also come out of the inhuman practice.¹³ As

¹² . *Ibid.*,

¹³ . Alwar Declared Scavenging Free –A Publication of Sualbh International, page no 3

pointed out above, though the rehabilitation is provided, the social stigma factor needs to be addressed.¹⁴ Then only the social acceptance of scavengers would be ensured by removing the scavenging stigma.¹⁵

Sulabh's very tactic way worked perfectly and provided a high social status by removing the social stigma. The new social status even paved a way for social acceptance. The method adopted by Sulabh is clearly set out in its objectives itself which reads as follows:

- *Liberation of scavengers from unhealthy and subhuman occupation of manual handling of excreta by converting bucket privies into Sulabh Shauchalaya (pour flush latrine with twin pits for on-site disposal of human waste);*
- *Rehabilitation of the relieved scavengers and their wards in other jobs after training;*
- *Help in social up gradation of scavengers and their promotion as equals in society;*
- *Set up information and employment exchange centers to help scavengers getting employment either in the government or non-governmental organizations;*
- *Open English-medium schools to provide education to the sons and daughters of scavengers along with others; and*
- *Help scavengers build their houses away from slums so that they can be taken out from the unhealthy environment.*¹⁶

In addition to vocational training is explained here:

- Helped them to declare that Alwar as a Scavenging Free
- Visit to President's Office¹⁷
- Visit to Parliament of India

¹⁴ . *Ibid.*,

¹⁵ . Social Stigma on Rehabilitated Manual Scavengers – A Case of Study Alwar; A Publication of Sualbh International.

¹⁶ . Siddhart Kumar Rastogi, "A Case Study f Sulabh International Social Service Organisation", available at http://web.archive.org/web/20110812205052/http://www.sulabhinternational.org/downloads/sulabh_case_studies_iim.pdf

¹⁷ . Meeting of the Hon'ble President, Republic of India, Smt.. Prtibha Devisingh Patil blesses erstwhile untouchable scavengers of India - A Publication of Sualbh International

- Celebrating festivals with Sulabh Family¹⁸
- Visit to United States of America

While celebrating the World Toilet Day, they took a oath and declared themselves as liberated. The oath reads as follows:

“We, the Women of Alwar, make a solemn declaration that scavenging system for cleaning latrines has come to an end for good in this town. Now, neither any women nor man is engaged in cleaning toilets in Alwar. Nobody is treating us as ‘untouchables’ any more. We have become part and parcel of the social mainstream. We hobnob, mix and dine with everybody without any caste distinction or discrimination. We celebrate all the traditional festivals; mingle with everyone at marriages without any bar. We visit to temples to offer our prayers without any check or restriction. Our life is totally changed now. Even in our wildest dreams we could not imagine the dawn of a day when we would be able to move about with dignity and respect, holding our heads high. Now, we are witnessing the fulfilment of our cherished dreams.

Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!

Dr. Ambedkar Ki Jai!

Sulabh Andolan Ki Jai!

Jai Hind! Jai Bharat!”¹⁹

It is obvious even from the Government of India documents that Sualbh plays a pro active role in reforming this social injustice. Sulabh has helped more than million people to get liberated and facilitated many self reliance schemes. Social acceptance has also been ensured. Many developments schemes were launched with the help of local administrations so as to accommodate and to have an inclusive growth.

Concluding Remarks

Manual scavenging is grave social injustice. There are very few nongovernmental organisations working for the advancements of the socially excluded people. Among them Sulabh stands for away. Even though they are also working for the scavengers, Sulabh’s method stands unique and looks very attractive this has helped more than

¹⁸. Worship of Sun God (Chhath Puja) Blessings for Liberated Untouchables- A Publication of Sualbh International

¹⁹. Alwar Declared Scavenging Free –A Publication of Sualbh International, page no 3

million scavengers to liberate and to be part of social mainstream. Removing the social stigma by creating new image by doing many value added services is an innovative tool. Self confidence and motivation provided by Sulabh cannot be explained with world. One has feel and realise. Really it is a journey of “Shame to Pride”.