

# Pedagogy and Human Rights Perspective

## What Teachers have to Say?

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### Abstract

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*Education is expected to develop a cohesive and peaceful society and for this, various perspectives exist which rely upon the role of education to achieve this objective. Contribution of education can be envisioned via school and school practices, in which pedagogy is one of the imperative aspects, where children unswervingly interact with each other. But, how a teacher perceives teaching-learning process is also significant. We know that providing equal opportunities, mutual respect, democratic environment etc. definitely subsidises positively to the idea of pedagogy. Coalescing pedagogy and human rights perspective provides a new avenue to develop human rights perspective based pedagogy, which can contribute significantly in teaching learning process in school to achieve a larger objective of creating our society a 'humane society'. But, this objective cannot be achieved unless teachers develop sensitivity toward this blending. Hence, the present paper explores the teachers' understanding about human rights and human rights perspective based pedagogy.*

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### CONTEXT

How can we foster the value of peace for all people and the use of non-violent ways of solving problems? Human rights education is predicated

on the assumption that we can build a humane and responsible society through education. Human rights are the rights a person has, simply, because they are a human being.

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Human rights are held by all persons, equally, without any discrimination. “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”[Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)].

When we say, “I’ve got my rights,” we, usually, think of those civil and political rights defined in the Indian constitution. They include freedom to assemble, freedom of worship, and the right to a fair trial and so on. However, it is realised by few individuals that social, economic, and cultural rights such as health care, housing, or a living wage, also constitute human rights (Kumar, S., 2018).

According to Reardon (1995), less knowledge and awareness about one’s right makes a person more susceptible to be exploited. Now, globally, the idea of human rights and human rights education has been accepted and it can generate possibilities to develop a free, just and peaceful society. It can also be used to save people from various kinds of abuses. For this, incorporating human rights perspective in teaching learning process is also essential.

Bernstein Tarrow (1987), said that empowerment is one of the important objectives of human rights perspective in pedagogy and education, which makes a person capable to take decision about themselves. The ultimate goal of a human rights perspective in

pedagogy is incorporating space for enabling people for working together to foster human rights, justice, and dignity for all. Starkey (1991), argued that we cannot achieve ultimate aim of human rights until our civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are denied. Therefore, it is very challenging to promote an understanding of a teaching- learning process based on human rights.

Frankel (1989) stated that human rights perspective is integral to the learning about one’s human rights, which incorporates responsibility along with rights. Human right has a social and individual context as they belong to a person as well as society. That is how every human right has individuality and collectiveness.

A human rights perspective in the teaching-learning processes deals with, basically, three aspects— *about* human rights, *for* human rights and *how* to implement it in pedagogy (Kumar, S. 2018). Its goal is to help learners understand human rights, value human rights, and take responsibility for respecting, defending and promoting human rights understanding.

A human rights perspective based pedagogy can be defined as education, training and information, aiming at building a universal culture of human rights, through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and molding of attitudes directed to— strengthening of respect for human beings and fundamental freedoms, full development of

the human personality and the sense of its dignity; promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations; indigenous people and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; enabling all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law, building and maintenance of peace; promotion of people-centered sustainable development and social justice; important strategy for achieving several principal goals, notably empowerment, participation, transparency, accountability; the prevention of conflict, conflict resolution, peacemaking and peace-building and the more effective protection and realisation of all human rights for all; long-term prevention of human rights abuses and violent conflicts, to the promotion of equality and sustainable development and the enhancement of people's participation in decision-making processes, within the democratic system and to promote the values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality, in each community and in society at large.

A human rights perspective based education will equip students to work towards such a society, so that they can participate in the democratic process and organise a democratic climate with others. (Kumar, S., 2018).

Teachers have a significant role to play in school education. There are different theories of learning explaining different roles of teacher in learning process. Some of them provide prime and dominating role to teacher, and others provide role of a facilitator. Despite various theoretical explanation about the role of teacher in learning, we know that it is difficult to imagine a school and classroom in absence of a teacher. From ancient to present, teacher continues to contribute in society via school. Therefore, it is important to understand the teachers' perspective about various practices happening in schools such as teaching, examination, co-curricular activities etc. So, this paper focuses to explore teachers' ideas and their understanding about their own teaching practices. Various studies show that learners are not given their due space in learning process and in some cases they are even punished and treated disrespectfully. In such situations their basic rights as child and learner are being deferred, which makes it necessary to explore the human rights practices in school. The close relationship of learner, teacher, pedagogical practices and human rights are closely connected, hence, this paper explores the teachers understanding about human rights perspective based pedagogy.

### **EXPLORING CONTEXT**

To explore teachers' understanding, ten government school teachers from

different schools were interviewed. All were social science teachers at secondary schools in Delhi. Teachers were selected randomly among the social science teachers. Every teacher was interviewed minimum three times to explore, understand and validate their responses. Collected responses were analysed to develop understanding, how teachers perceive human rights and pedagogy based on human rights.

It was essential to know the teachers' understanding about the concept of human rights first, and then about a human rights perspective, based teaching-learning process, because their understanding about the basic concept of human rights will represent their pedagogic understanding based on a human rights perspective. Broadly, the analysis has been presented in two themes. There are sub-themes under each broad theme. Themes emerged from the responses collected from teachers which were also supported by existing theoretical disposition about human rights and pedagogy. In the first broad theme, the understanding of the teachers about human rights is presented and the second theme presents their understanding of a human rights perspective based teaching-learning process.

### **THEMES**

1. Understanding of human rights and a human rights perspective
2. A human rights perspective in classroom practices

## **UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**

### **Human Rights for Self-development**

Most of the teachers said that human rights are important and essential for personal, as well as national development. The teachers said that one cannot survive without rights. They also accepted the importance of democracy in this regard and accepted that there are many problems in a democracy, but it is the best form of governance. In this regard, they talked about the right to life, the right to vote, the right to speech and so on. It was stated by the teachers that rights can only be used, if the citizens are active and take part in the political processes. The awareness that, until one is aware about one's rights, how will the rights be used by that person was also highlighted by the teachers. In this regard, they favoured Human Rights Education. One of the teachers said, "*keval Social Science mein ek chapter daalne se kuch nahi hoga. Zarurat to bade star par adhikaro ki baat karne ki hai or iske liye agar Human Rights Education ek subject laya bhi jaye to koi galat nahi hoga.*" Their clear argument to introduce Human Rights Education was to spread awareness. This awareness would lead people towards the development of themselves and of the nation. Another teacher took examples and said, "*ki hum vikas ke liye keval sarkar ki taraf dekh te hai par income tax ke alawa hamara*

*desh ke vikas mein kya yogdaan hai, is par kabhi nahi sochte. Job bhi bas salary ke liye to karte hai. To vikas ka sawaal to aatm chetna ke sath bhi juda hai, desh ke sath lagaav or uske sath samaaj mein ghatane wali samsayon ke prati chinta se bhi juda hai.* Overall, a common understanding was shared by the teachers that rights are important for development at the individual, as, well as the social level.

### **Equality with Dignity**

The notion of equality was favoured by most teachers. Most of them (six teachers) said that equality was essential to develop an egalitarian society. Gender equality, caste-based equality, religion-based equality and so on were favoured by the teachers. Equality was defined by the teachers, as having no discrimination between human beings, whether men or women. There should be respect for each other and a space to speak, if something wrong happens to them. A teacher mentioned that he always treats his servant (who was a 15-year old girl) equally like his child. Immediately, he also said, *“aapko to pata hai aajkal servant milna kitna mushkil hai or milte hai to kitne paise maangte hai. Ye ladki bhi gareeb ghar ki hai to maine rakhliya.”* But, he did not say as to how much he paid her. What kind of human rights does he respect when he has a 15-year-old girl servant? But, he justified it by saying that she was very poor.

The teachers raised issues related to women’s rights. One of the teachers said that women, in India, have many problems, even if they are educated. On the same lines, another teacher said that human rights are the rights for everyone, without any discrimination. In her view, *“samaaj mein sabhi ka samaan ho na, na keval adhikaro ke liye avashayak hai balki ek sammanpurvak jine ke liye bhi aniwarye hai.”* She emphasised on women’s rights and child rights and said that these groups (women and the children) suffer more in India and face many problems daily.

The teachers were very unhappy with the system and said that human rights are the rights of every human being and should be given to all, without any kind of discrimination and bias. She emphasised the fact that there is no use of human rights, if they are only on paper. They must be implemented, even to the lowest level of society.

### **The Rights are the Responsibilities**

The teachers talked about responsibilities and said that only having rights is insufficient. There is a need for associated responsibilities. They said that rights and responsibilities move together. People who claim their rights, must know about the associated responsibilities. One of them said that responsibilities are more important than the claims of the rights. He narrated an incident, *“ek bar parents aye or mujhse ladane lage ki is bar hamare bache ko*

*scholarship nahi mili. Jabki maine 10 din tak wait kiya ki vo aakar le jaye. Maine fir paise jama kara diye. To ye koi achhi baat hai. Vo keval rights jaante hain, zimmedari nahi.*" He said that this is not the only incident in the school, even the students, talk badly to the teacher and the Principal. He said that the teachers, have to apologise to students on several occasions. He, also, said that the students do not respect teachers at all. Everyone talks about rights, but not about duties and responsibilities. Another teacher said, *"agar hum ek samtavadi samaj banade to responsibility to logo mein khud-b-khud aa jayegi"* (responsibility will automatically come to people if we can develop an egalitarian society). This shows that they were quite aware of and understand the association of responsibility with rights.

### **Child Rights**

The teachers talked about child rights with reference to human rights. Their concern was with the rights of the poor children working in factories and homes and begging at signals. One of the teachers, very emotionally, said that children are in trouble in India. She took examples of the red light signals in Delhi and said, *"kuch bhi ho yeh to sara sar anyay hai bachon ke sath kyon ki unki kya galti hai. Mera to dil ro padta hai. Par kuchh nahi karte hum. Insaniyat to hai nahi, varna kuch to karte hum."* She said, "Is the government not aware of them?

Do leaders not cross red lights? They all do but do not bother about them."

Some teachers raised issues related to child rights, with reference to the state. They said that the state should take responsibility for food, shelter and education of each child. In this regard, they, also, talked about the NGOs, who take funds from the government. This proved that the government is not serious about these children.

### **Theory vs Practice**

The issue of theory versus practice was raised by the teachers. Their concern was that there are many rights and laws for everyone, but people are not able to use them as they are not aware of their rights. Even if they are, the government complicates the procedure to such an extent, that a common man does not dare to ask about such rights. A teacher, clearly, said that there are two discourses of human rights — one theoretical and the other practical. The theoretical aspect has hardly, any concern with the practical aspect. She stated that the law said one thing and its practice said something else. According to another teacher, the gap between theory and practice should be removed, if we talk about human rights and work towards a more egalitarian society. But, she believed that human rights are for every one and should reach every one for their development.

### **Universality vs Relativity**

Universality vs relativity is a very important debate in the human rights discourse and this was touched upon in the teachers' discussions. Some of them said that human rights are universal and not relative, because of its significance. One of them argued that if human rights are relative, then different people will interpret them differently and no exploitation will take place. Thus, human rights are always universal. On the same lines, another teacher said that human rights are universal and we all need the same kinds of rights across the world, whether India or America. The continuous changes in the discourse of rights has also changed society. But, this change is insufficient. He said that all must be equal without any kind of discrimination based on caste, class, region, religion, gender and so on, for human rights perspective to exist. He said that we should celebrate all kinds of festivals in school, to impart our values and rituals to our students.

### **Fundamental Rights and Human Rights**

What is the difference between Fundamental Rights and Human Rights is an important question in itself and various responses came out in the discussion. Five teachers said that there is no difference between fundamental rights and human rights, they are almost the same. Human rights were the extended form of fundamental rights.

In the same way, a teacher said that human rights are, somehow, like fundamental rights, and there is no difference between them. But, she mentioned that human rights are associated with the marginalised communities and people like her, do not need many facilities from the government, as she believed that she is independent. She said that they need rights, but different kind of rights for the poor people. She said that it is very important to respect everyone, whether they are colleagues or servants at home. She said that human rights and fundamental rights are the same, but the poor needs human rights and she and the others like her needed fundamental rights. Some said that the only difference is that fundamental rights are constitutional, while human rights are general.

### **A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES**

#### **The Human Rights Perspective**

From the discussion, it was observed that teachers did not have much understanding about a human rights perspective. Their understanding was more about a human rights education. Some of them said that Human Rights Education must be a part of the school system. But, what is the meaning of a human rights perspective and how does one make the teaching-learning process based on it was not clear. A teacher said that human rights and the human

rights perspective are the same. On asking if she uses the human rights perspective in teaching, she did not say much and only said, “*haan karti hu. Main sabko samaan samajhti hu or jaatipaati ka bhed nahi karti.*” She restricted her notion of the human rights perspective-based teaching only to marginalised communities and their rights. Another teacher said that she uses the human rights perspective in teaching. She said that learning is the students’ prime rights and she make them learn. Her response seemed, as if she has something and is giving that to the learners. Though many teachers accepted that students should get full respect in class, most of them were unaware of the actual meaning of a human rights perspective. Their understanding was limited to human rights and the Human Rights Education.

### **Dealing with Critical and Sensitive Issues**

Dealing with critical and sensitive issues is quite challenging for the teachers, at every level, and it becomes even more challenging at the school level. Some of the teachers said that it is important to be conscious, while teaching some sensitive issues. One teacher mentioned examples, such as the *Godhara* incident and the attack on a *Gurudwara* in Amritsar and said that the students had started to discuss such issues amongst themselves and the discussion was grounded

on religion-based discrimination. He said that it became very difficult for him to handle that class. He, also, expressed his helplessness in dealing with such issues in the class. “*kitaabo mein to pata nahi kya kya likh diya gaya hai, jinhone likha hai vo aakar padaayen to unko pata chale ki in muddo ko kaise padhana hai.*” He was very uncomfortable in teaching some issues given in the Social Sciences text books related to religion and caste.

### **Equal Opportunity for Students**

All the teachers said that they provided equal opportunities to everyone in the classroom processes, without any kind of discrimination. One said that he always keeps in mind that there should not be any kind of unfairness to the students, in terms of marks and other areas. He also, said that he takes care of language and social issues while teaching but he could not state any example as to what kind of language and issues he was referring to. He did not respond much asked about a human rights based perspective in teaching. Another teacher said that she always tries to be fair to all students. She said that she does not have any favourite student, like other teachers. She said, “*mere mann mein to koi bhed bhav nahi hai kisi bhi jati ya samudaye ke bache keliye.*”

### **Humane Teaching**

All the teachers said that they taught very humanly. One of them



mentioned using the humanitarian approach in classroom teaching. He explained this saying that teaching is a two-way process and depended upon the ability of both the teachers and students. He said that if one respected the student's way of learning and understanding, his or her ideas, and provided space to them, then the pedagogy was based on human rights. He also accepted that his way of teaching is unconsciously humanitarian. He said that some students are very naughty and one have to be naughty with them, to some extent. He meant scolding, not beating. He said that, sometimes, he scolds the students, but not harshly.

### Methods of Teaching

The knowledge of different teaching methods and using them in class is quite important for teachers. But, a majority of teachers said that they only use textbooks. They ask students to read the book and then explain whatever is read out. One of the teachers said that, generally, he uses the textbook, but sometimes, he brings some newspaper cuttings to the class to start a discussion, but that happens very rarely. He said that, sometimes, he does issue-based teaching, picking up an issue, and talking about it and relates it to the topic. Teachers favoured textbook methods as it is easy, convenient and time saving.

A teacher said, "*zaroori to ye hai ki students seekh jaye. Ye sab private schools ke drame hai, warna hum bhi*

*to padhkar aaye hai or theek thaak padhein hai. Agar sab bache hi kar sakte to hamari kya zaroorat hoti.*" She said that whatever method is used, it should be used effectively and she said that she uses the textbook effectively.

### Punishment

Punishment does not help students to learn anything, instead, it creates problem in the development of the children. Though no teacher clearly said that they beat students but yes, to some extent, they accept that sometimes they have to be strict. One teacher accepted that sometimes when students were out of control, he reacted and sometimes beat them but not harshly. He said, "*kai baar darana padta hai. Waise to sarkar ne hamare hath bandh hi rakhe hai.*" Another teacher admired the teaching during his school days and said that her teacher used to beat them if they did not complete their work. That was a time when there was discipline, now everything is the opposite. She said, "*aaj to hum kisi bache ko hath lagana to dur, kuch keh bhi nahi sakte or bache hamari sunte nahi to kaise kam chalega?*" (Forget about touching, we cannot even say anything to a child when they do not listen to us, then how will it work).

### Authority in Class

On asking what important things the teachers kept in mind when they went to class, one said that he enters the class full of attitude and

with a feeling of authority. He does this because he feels that, if he would not do so, the class may not listen to him. Therefore, to avoid unwanted behaviour, he behaves thus. He, also, said that most of the time, immediately after entering the class, he asks students to write, whatsoever he wrote on the board, so that they are busy and do not make any noise in class. On the same lines, another teacher said, *“main jyadatar class mein thoda raub ke sath jati hu. Par iska matlab ye nahi hai ki main authoritative behaviour karti hun. Main maanti hun ki thoda to teacher ko strict hona hi padega.”* She admitted that she loses her temper and shouts on them, sometimes, if the students do not listen to her in the class, but it is very rare. She said that she, later, feels bad about her behaviour.

### **The Students' Respect**

It, clearly, came out that most of the teachers felt that the students must be respected in class and their voice should be heard. One teacher said, *“bachon ki baatein sun ana ek teacher ke liye bahot zaruri hai”* (listening to students is essential for a teacher). The teachers said that they do respect the students by giving them equal opportunities in class. One teacher mentioned that she sees this as a reciprocal relationship, where teachers respects students and the students respect teachers. One teacher said, “Child-centered teaching is teaching based on a human rights perspective. She said,

“If one will make their class child-centered, gradually, all rights will be respected.”

### **Discipline**

The teachers' understanding from the discussions clearly shows that discipline is important for the class and for teaching, but no sufficient ideas or arguments were given to show how discipline could be developed, except by scolding and beating. The teachers said, *“sarkar ne to hamare hath bandh rakhe hai to hum discipline kaise la sakte hai. Or jo sab ho raha hai woh to aap dekh rahe hai”* (there are lots of restrictions on us, how can we maintain discipline and the rest you can see, what is happening). Another teacher said, *“hum jab school mein the tab discipline hota tha, dar rehta tha ki teacher daante ya marengay. Usi ka parinaam haiki hum aaj safal hai. Aaj to hum kuch keh bhi nahi sakte to discipline kaise ayega”* (there was discipline in our school time, we always thought that teachers will scold or beat us and as a result we are successful in life. These days, we cannot even say anything, then how will there be discipline). The teachers' idea of discipline was the same as that in the army. How self-discipline can be promoted was not discussed amongst them. They felt that beating and scolding were the only ways to establish discipline.

### **The Teachers' Role**

Different kinds of responses came up, with reference to the teachers' role.

The teachers said that respecting students is very important in class. One of them said that the role of the teachers is to create a child-centered classroom. But, some responses are quite different *“teacher ka ye bhi role hai kivo class mein discipline banake rakhe or iske liye thoda harsh or strict hona hi padta hai.”* Another said, *“class maintain karna zaroori hai nahi to Principal sunate hai. Sara time to isi me jata hai”* (it is important to maintain discipline in class, otherwise the principal objects. The whole time goes in doing this).

Thus, the teachers had mixed reactions, where some said that making the class child-centered is the role of a teacher, while others said that it is important to do all this but, mostly, they just maintain the class decorum and cannot do anything more important for the students' learning.

## CONCLUSION

The interviews, regarding classroom practices and incorporating human rights perspective in pedagogy, show that there is a huge difference between what teachers think of human rights as a concept and how they understand human rights perspective based pedagogy. Various issues and concerns have emerged from the analysis. Interaction with teachers show that students have very little space to say things as per their understanding. Analysis of teachers views also do not show any active participation of learners in

class. They are there in the school, just for the sake of attending class. The teacher's authority seems to be supreme in class. Teacher did not register their interest in learner centered class and mostly talked about teacher fronted classes, which obviously provides very less space for context-based-teaching-learning-process. This indirectly, rejects the authority of learners in classroom. Interaction also revealed that many teacher face problems in dealing with sensitive issues. Not only this, sometimes they avoid teaching such issues. They argued that they have not been given any training for dealing such controversial issues. They used to deal sensitive issues with insensitively. The teachers' inability and lack of knowledge was clearly visible in their responses. Their biased understanding creates more problems, as far as sensitive issues were concerned. Such attitude may develop negative attitude in learners as they are not given appropriate space to explore and understand social science issues rather readily available description are given to them. The classroom practices were explained as centric to examination only and to complete the syllabus of a particular term in time. It was clearly visible that teachers did not have faith in their learners' abilities. That is why, information usually given to them without giving them opportunity for reflective and critical thinking.

Human rights perspective based pedagogy provides learners space to think critically and construct actively with respect, agency and collaboration without any kinds of discrimination and biases, neither for learner, learning

and knowledge nor about self (teacher), systemic practices and context. For this, empowered teachers who believe and have faith in humane society can contribute in developing human rights perspective based pedagogy.

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