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Human Rights Awareness among the Indian Youth

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Introduction

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

-Nelson Mandela

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 10 December 1948, set forth a global movement towards achieving the ever elusive goal of ‘*Human Rights for All*’. Its profound significance lies in giving an authentic expression of human rights as a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations". *Human rights* are *rights* inherent to all *human* beings, irrespective of their gender, caste, creed, colour or nationality. Human rights are, therefore, universal values, and hence the increasing recognition of the universal right to learn about human rights. For building a global society wherein every individual has human rights, imparting human rights education is vital. It constitutes a comprehensive, life-long process by which people at all levels and in all strata of society learns respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies. Human rights education is in fact a long-term strategy aimed at meeting our present needs and as well as those of coming generations.

All societies and cultures have in the past developed some conception of rights and principles that should be respected. Some of these rights and principles have been considered universal in nature. Human rights are ingrained in the Indian Constitution and are as ancient as human civilization. Human rights awareness programmes should be part of everyone's education. It fosters the development of human values, rights and duties through a new design of curriculums, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers, etc. The mandate for human rights awareness is unequivocal: everyone has a human right to know his/her rights. *India* is committed to spread *human rights* literacy among various sections of society and promote *awareness* of the safeguards. We must remember that in order to enjoy or enforce human rights, people have to have knowledge of them.

There is a growing recognition of the potential of the human rights framework to effect social change and the importance of human rights awareness for all segments of society. With economic integration and advancement in communications bringing all parts of the world closer together, human rights are being increasingly recognized as a unifying moral force that transcends national boundaries and empowers ordinary people everywhere to demand their basic human rights. This new awareness is not limited to educated elites or developed countries but also has slowly but surely permeated to even third world countries.

There is a grave need to spread awareness about human rights among the younger generation, as a tool to cultivate defenses against oppression and exploitation. In a country containing one-sixth of the world's population, it is that the job of spreading human rights awareness has just begun. The youth has an important role to play in helping children who will become citizens of the future to develop awareness of world issues in particular and peace and human rights in general. We need to build a culture based on human rights through education and awareness of human rights. There is a need to inspire the youth to become valuable advocates for tolerance and peace. Working together to teach human rights we can make a difference. Youth who know their rights can defend against or report abuses.

Over the last decade, a few studies have been conducted across various countries to assess the human rights awareness status among the people, particularly the youth. In a study on the human rights awareness of secondary school students in the Philippines (2003-04), it was reported that the greater majority of the respondents across all variables (gender, ethnicity, type of school, geographical classification and region) were aware of "human rights", though the urban students exhibited greater awareness as compared to the rural students. The primary source of knowledge on human rights was the school, followed by television/radio, and family/parents. Though the students were aware of the concept of human rights, they were not sure about the exact provisions, violations and safeguards.

In a study regarding the human rights awareness level among the people of South Africa and Uganda (2006), it was found that the public awareness levels were inadequate and measures need to be put in place for improving the levels of public awareness and perceptions of human rights in both countries.

In India, in a study in Gujarat (2010) the common man's awareness about human rights was found to be low. Only a small percentage of the respondents could mention one or two forms of human rights violations, or even the Constitutional safeguards against such violations.

In another study on the state of human rights awareness among the public in Yemen (2013), it was found that the public was aware of the concept of human rights but there was still need to strengthen the understanding of human rights awareness among the public.

The present study aims to assess the human rights awareness among the Indian youth.

Objectives

- To compare the level of human rights awareness among the male and female youth
- To compare the level of human rights awareness among the urban and rural youth
- To compare the level of human rights awareness among the youth based on age groups

Hypotheses

- The level of human rights awareness among the male and female youth does not differ significantly.
- The level of human rights awareness among the urban and rural youth does not differ significantly.
- The level of human rights awareness among the youth when compared on the basis of age groups is not significantly different.

Methodology

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 210 Indian youth from Bareilly(U.P.) district, including 105 males and 105 females. Of these sample subjects, 100 from urban background and 115 were from rural background with 122 in the age group of 18-25 years and 88 in the age group of 26-35 years. All the respondents were educated, having completed their senior secondary exams.

Tools Used

For the present investigation, the Human Rights Awareness Test (HRAT) developed by Dr. Vishal Sood and Dr. Arti Anand was used. The HRAT consisted of 50 items spread over three dimensions (knowledge, understanding and situations for violations) with 25 positively and 25 negatively worded items. The scoring was 2,1,0 for positively worded items and 0,1,2 for negatively worded items with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 100.

Statistical Techniques

The raw data so obtained was statistically analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test using MS-EXCEL software.

RESULTS

Table 1: Comparison of level of human rights awareness among the male and female youth

Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level of significance
Male	105	72.46	12.72	1.87	Not significant
Female	105	69.27	12.10		

A perusal of the data presented in Table 1 indicates that both male and female Indian youth exhibit considerable awareness about human rights. Gender does not appear to play a deciding factor in the level of human rights awareness among the Indian youth. Hence, the first null hypothesis is accepted. With education no longer being confined to members of a particular gender and all government measures for equal opportunities for education and jobs, gender no longer seems to be significant influencing factor among today's Indian youth.

Table 2: Comparison of level of human rights awareness among the urban and rural youth

Locality	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level of significance
Urban	100	70.21	12.37	1.06	Not significant
Rural	115	68.35	13.22		

An observation of the contents of Table 2 shows that both urban and rural Indian youth exhibit considerable awareness about human rights. Locality does not appear to play a deciding factor in the level of human rights awareness among the Indian youth. Hence, the second null hypothesis is accepted. In today's India, educational opportunities and growth prospects being abundantly available to the rural youth as well as their urban counterparts and equal exposure to the media, locality is seemingly an insignificant player in determining the level of awareness about human rights among the Indian youth.

Table 3: Comparison of level of human rights awareness among the youth based on age

Age group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level of significance
18-25 years	122	72.49	13.07	2.21	Significant at 0.05 level
26-35 years	88	68.60	12.20		

An examination of the data presented in Table 3 reveals that while overall Indian youth has considerable awareness about human rights, age does play a deciding role. Here we find that the younger lot, belonging to the 18-25 years age group shows significantly higher levels of human rights awareness as compared to those in the 26-35 years age group. This could be considered a positive motivation for the Human Rights promotions campaigns that are being undertaken since the last decade by the government and NGOs, involving school and college going children.

Conclusion

The findings of the present investigation indicate that overall the majority of Indian youth is aware about human rights, including the provisions, situations considered as violations as well as constitutional safeguards. While gender and locality do not seem to significantly influence the level of human rights awareness among the Indian youth, their age group does affect the level of awareness. With the younger generation being increasingly exposed to media and human rights education being incorporated into the formal education curriculum, this result is indeed a positive indicator. There is a growing consensus across the world for making human rights education mandatory at school and college level. It can contribute to the building of free, just, and peaceful societies. Human rights awareness is also increasingly recognized as an effective strategy to prevent human rights abuses. There exists a synergistic relationship between peace and human rights. Let us strive to move towards a more peaceful, humane and tolerant society with greater awareness about human rights.

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