

Human Rights and Education

By Abbas Rashid

Paper prepared for OSI Education Conference 2005: "Education and Open
Society: A Critical Look at New Perspectives and Demands"

July 2, 2005

Introduction

There are two main aspects to the relationship between human rights and education. In one sense the denial of education has in itself come to be seen as the violation of a basic human right and a synonym for disempowerment. The other has to do with the content of the curriculum and the extent to which it possesses a human rights orientation. As to the first, hundreds of millions are still denied this right and remain illiterate with South Asia, accounting for the largest number in any single region in the world. But, a matter of equal concern is the content of the curriculum that most of those lucky enough to get an 'education' are exposed to.

According to Amartya Sen, '...there is need to pay attention to the narrowing of horizons, especially of children, that illiberal and intolerant education can produce....Indeed, the nature of education is quite central to peace in the world....every human being's identities have many different components, related to nationality, language, location, class, occupation, history, religion, political beliefs, and so on. A Bangladeshi Muslim is not only a Muslim, but also a Bengali and possibly quite proud of the richness of the Bengali literature and other cultural achievements. Similarly, the history of the Arab world with which an Arab child today can potentially relate is not only the achievements of Islam (important as they are), but also the great secular accomplishments in mathematics, science and literature which are part and parcel of Arab history. Even today when a scientist in, say, the Imperial College uses an "algorithm," he or she unconsciously celebrates the innovativeness of the ninth-century Arab mathematician, Al-Khwarizmi, from whose name the term algorithm is derived (the term "algebra" comes from his book, "Al Jabr wa-al-Muqabilah" [Sen, Oct 28, 2003]

Amnesty International defines Human Rights Education (HRE) as a process whereby people learn about their rights and the rights of others, within a framework of participatory and interactive learning. HRE is concerned with changing attitudes and behaviour, learning new skills, and promoting the exchange of knowledge and information. HRE is long-term, and aims to provide an understanding of the issues, and equip people with the skills to articulate their rights and communicate this knowledge to others. HRE includes a varied range of innovative and effective education programs in the formal, informal and non-formal sectors. It recognises the universality and indivisibility of human rights; increases knowledge and understanding of human rights; empowers people to claim their rights; assists people to use the legal instruments designed to protect human rights; uses interactive and participatory methodology to develop attitudes of respect for human rights; develops the skills needed to defend human rights; integrates the principles of human rights into everyday life; creates a space for dialogue and change; encourages respect and tolerance

But, what concerns us here particularly is creating space for dialogue, promotion of understanding and hopefully a change in attitudes. In other words the issue is not simply one of supplying missing information by cataloguing rights guaranteed by law, national or international, but of bringing about a change in perspective and eventually mindsets. And whatever the cultural differentiation or the possible stress on 'Asian values,' the basic point of reference of a rights regime anywhere has to be the individual, even as the collective interests of the community or the nation are duly acknowledged.

Education is obviously a key vehicle for the dissemination of rights and the project of changing attitudes by incorporating a substantive rights element into education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. The Assembly then called upon the member countries to publicize the text of the

Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions...." The Dakar Framework for Action, adopted in 2000, affirmed the need to implement a "quality education" within an "expanded vision" of education. The sixth goal of the Dakar Framework is *"improving all aspects of the quality of education..."* more than a right to access education, each person has a right to participate in a quality education.

A new vision of quality education is essential. Current international events around the world have demonstrated that the conventional definition of quality education as reading, writing and arithmetic should be further expanded to address new challenges such as relevance, universal values, peace and security and informed decision-making. In this context, quality education has to be based on a human rights approach, as well as address areas including, but not limited to, cultural diversity, multilingualism in education, peace and non-violence, sustainable development and life skills. (UNESCO: Human Rights Education)

Exactly what constitutes human rights and which rights are to be given priority are issues that have invited considerable debate but at its simplest it can be said that "human rights constitute a universal set of manners, a worldwide book of etiquette, that the structures of power ought to abide by in their treatment of the people over whom they rule. Human rights are designed to protect the less powerful from the whims and caprices of the mighty. They provide protections that have been judged to work to make societies more equitable, peaceful, stable. The fact that the power elites often fail to heed their manners, that abhorrent practices like slavery are still found in the world, does not mean that they are judged tolerable by the world community as a whole any more than the fact that murders still occur means that laws against murder are meaningless. "

The setting of norms of behaviour to which the international community subscribes, by and large, needs to be rooted in a broader consensus of nations as well as regional and international institutions. The United Nations to which the

new world order has not been particularly kind must obviously continue to play a key role in this regard. "And, international covenants and conventions such as the Geneva Conventions, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and dozens of others, as ratified by the nations of the world, that codify those principles in law, remain important landmarks in elaborating a consensual framework for the elaboration and assertion of human rights across the globe along with the Nuremberg court but including today the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and several others that interpret those international human rights laws as well as those international nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that help monitor violations of those laws and encourage the enforcement of them." But, what of the argument categorized as cultural relativism? Some Asian leaders have argued vociferously that Asian culture puts greater emphasis upon the needs of the community than the rights of the individual and that hence the social and economic development of the larger society takes precedence over the individual's civil and political rights. This dilemma underscores the importance of the argument for human rights from a political consensus or constructivist point of view. It is not entirely true to suggest that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the product of an essentially Western consensus. "There is no question of course that many of the rights understood today to be universal....are consistent with the Western liberal tradition. But the declaration itself incorporated a whole series of social and economic rights such as the right to food, housing, medical care, and employment not traditionally associated with the Western conception of rights and which still remain controversial in some Western contexts." [Shulz. p. 118-124]

Inevitably, though, there is often a difference in emphasis in the rights education offered by less developed or dictatorial societies and the developed countries.

The former espouse economic, social and cultural rights rather than civil or political rights. The latter emphasize civil and political rights rather than economic, social and cultural rights. This polarization and politicization obviously renders a consensus approach to human rights education more difficult. [Symonides, UNESCO, p.284]

The teaching of human rights

In 1978, the International congress on the Teaching of Human Rights held in Vienna highlighted the indivisibility of Human Rights—civil, political economic, social and cultural and propounded the following aims for human rights education

1. Fostering the attitudes of tolerance, respect and solidarity
2. Providing knowledge about human rights in both their national and international dimensions
3. Developing the individual's awareness of the ways and means by which human rights can be translated into social and political reality [Symonides, UNESCO, 1998, p. 281]

Over recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on a 'Human Rights' component of education with the United Nations highlighting the issue before the international community. Having declared 1995-2004 as the United Nations decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), it is now in the process of initiating as a follow-up, the World Programme for Human Rights Education. During the period 2005-2007 the focus will be on human rights education in primary and secondary education. The World Programme is envisaged as an ongoing process focusing on specific sectors worldwide, with objectives to be met within a 2 to 3 year timeframe. Compared to the comprehensive approach of the decade, the World Programme provides for a

more focused approach, "structured in consecutive phases" to be implemented worldwide with clear allocation of responsibilities in each country, thus enabling governments to make tangible progress in specific areas. As matters stood at the end of the last decade, In most regions of the world human rights education is to be found at the higher or the tertiary levels and is mostly absent at the pre-school, primary and secondary levels. Where it is available in some measure, as in North America, for instance, the discretion of the teacher is central and the teacher is often hampered by lack of time, paucity of training materials, lack of confidence in dealing with sensitive rights issues, etc. At the secondary level of education there was more human rights content to be found in many countries by the end of the last decade. For instance, in California authorities developed " a model curriculum to tackle issues of inhumanity and genocide" while in New York authorities inserted more human rights information into history and political movement courses. In Europe, references to human rights are more likely to be found in civics courses, though the trend suggested that more such material would also be incorporated into history, religion, geography, literature, languages and social sciences. In the Middle East, Asia and Pacific, references to human rights are mostly in civics courses. In Australia, there is an emphasis on multi-cultural studies, and human rights issues are incorporated throughout syllabuses covering society and culture, legal studies, history and geography, etc. The Philippines seems to have among the more developed programs of human rights education for teachers in the region. It has developed a variety of materials to educate teachers for human rights dissemination including modules to train teachers in international human rights standards as linked to the local situation and the national Constitution. In Central and South America, too, there is a lack of substantive courses on human rights and these tend to be infused in the curriculum via existing courses. Africa, generally, seems to emphasize human rights education the least in its curricula. In most parts of the world, substantive courses on human rights can be found at the higher or tertiary level, especially at law faculties in the universities. These are mostly optional though substantive courses tend to deal with international instruments and mechanisms while

courses on constitutional law may focus more on the local perspective linked to human rights. For teachers everywhere, there is the question of whether to be engaged in education 'on' human rights or education 'for' human rights beyond the confines of the classroom. In other words distinguishing between the role of the teacher and the activist [Symonides, UNESCO, p. 287-290], more so in less or non-democratic societies.

In all regions of the world there is a variety of initiatives taken by non-governmental organizations for promoting human rights education beyond the school setting. A variety of educational means and materials including, cartoons, games, posters and audio-visuals have been evolved, highlighting the need to improve outreach programs and diversify the methodology of teaching human rights. While this is a welcome development, the precise impact of human rights education at the non-formal level is hard to assess. [UNESCO, p. 291-293] But then we don't know all that much in this respect about the impact of formal programs either. Possibly, a series of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Surveys (KAPS) could provide some insight into changes brought about as a result of human rights education. In Pakistan, for example, rather restricted surveys during 2002-3 of madrassas, schools, colleges and universities in urban areas sought to assess the opinions of students and faculty towards human rights and peace issues, by reference largely to minorities, women and India. A finding that seems to endorse an intuitive understanding of the situation suggests that intolerance and militant attitudes are more prevalent among madrasa students, less so among public sector schools, and least in the elite schools where O-and A-level examinations are the norm and better quality text books with greater sensitivity to rights issues are taught. Rahman notes that since he carried out a similar survey in 1999, there appeared to have been a shift away from militancy vis-a-vis India even in government schools but intolerance for minorities remained high though the attitudes were considerably better with respect to women. [Rahman, T, *Denizens of alien worlds*: OUP, 2004, p. 37].

Teaching human rights, of course, is problematic nearly everywhere. For instance, 'the mistreatment of minorities in Pakistan is a silence/denial in the Civics text. The exclusion of women from the equality discourse amounts to the exclusion of women from citizenship as the Civics textbook defines citizenship in terms of equality, liberty, autonomy, agency, and independence.' [Saigol, Symbolic violence, SAHE, 2000, p.225]. In the mid-term review of the UN Decade for Human Rights education a number of problems were identified with respect to human rights education in various countries and regions: Both Governments and non-governmental organizations are confronted with a number of obstacles in developing and implementing human rights education programmes. Governments generally mention the need for human resources, such as documentation specialists, training experts and other appropriate personnel. Materials for activities for human rights education (teaching, learning and training materials), and information on how these materials can be obtained, are also needed. There is also mention of the need for learning methodologies appropriate to human rights education. Funding, and in particular a long-term funding system that would ensure the long-term impact of human rights education programmes, is cited as a need both by Governments and non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations express the need for more political will on the part of Governments to develop and implement national plans of action for human rights education, to undertake human rights education programmes and to enact laws supporting human rights education, in line with the goals of the Decade. They also see the need for improved partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations in support of human rights education, and for Governments to support the use of

the media to promote human rights. A few non-governmental organizations stated that illiteracy, traditional cultures and values, political instability and, most important, poverty are obstacles to work in human rights education. In the Americas. Lack of political will, limited resources, and a lack of knowledge and understanding of human rights issues were mentioned throughout the region as major impediments to setting up lasting programmes on human rights education and training. In some countries, political instability, corruption, endemic poverty and illiteracy made the task of introducing human rights education more difficult and, at the same time, more urgent and necessary. According to the mid-term review of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004, an enormous gap remains between the commitments and obligations made in connection with the decade, the expectations raised, and the resources actually committed at every level. [UNHCHR report on mid-term evaluation, p.9-23]

The Political context

As much as anything else, however, what needs to be kept in mind is that there is a political context to the teaching of human rights that is generally recognized but often not clearly stated. In fact, all education in its implications is a political process. [Apple: Ideology and Curriculum, 2004, p. 56]. As such the issue is not only one of filling a knowledge deficit or information gap, but also of engaging or confronting an alternative contextual framework or paradigm. Rights, others and one's own, are best internalized within a framework of critical understanding of socio-economic and political phenomenon.

We can illustrate the salience of the political context by reference to three specific cases of the US, India and Pakistan:

Writing of the return of powerful conservative forces in the US to dominance, Apple points to their economic, political, social and cultural capital as well as their strategy of redefining the meaning of key ideological concepts that organize our common sense such as democracy and citizenship. These are all crucial, he

argues, but sometimes dominance returns because of historical events that are 'accidental.' However, the ground for our understanding of these events, he says has already been prepared by what Raymond Williams has called "structures of feeling." Thus, Apple contends, 'even when it is not planned hegemonic meanings and the differential power relations that they legitimate may get reconstituted in damaging ways.' [Apple, p.158]

However, there is much in national political contexts that can be attributed to 'continuity' rather than 'accident.' Consider what a teacher in Pennsylvania has to say about the broader context of teaching and learning at her university without any particular allusion to the tragic events of 11Sept, 2001:

'I realize that my students are, in fact, the oppressed, as Paulo Freire's "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" pointed out, and that they are paying for their own oppression. So, I patiently explain: no, our government has not been the friend of democracy in Chile; yes, our government did fund both the coup and the junta torture-machine; yes, the same goes for most of Latin America. Then, one student asks, "Why?" Well, I say, the CIA and the corporations run roughshod over the world in part because of the ignorance of the people of the United States, which apparently is induced by formal education, reinforced by the media, and cheered by Hollywood. As the more people read, the less they know and the more indoctrinated they become, you get this national enabling stupidity to attain which they go into bottomless pools of debt. If it weren't tragic, it would be funny. Meanwhile, this expensive stupidity facilitates US funding of the bloody work of death squads, juntas, and terror regimes abroad. It permits the war we are waging - an unfair, illegal, unjust, illogical, and expensive war, which announces to the world the failure of our intelligence and, by the way, the creeping weakness of our economic system. Every man, woman, and child killed by a bomb, bullet, famine, or polluted water is a murder - and a war crime. And it signals the impotence of American education to produce brains equipped with the bare necessities for democratic survival: analyzing and asking questions.

Let me put it succinctly: I don't think serious education is possible in America. Anything you touch in the annals of knowledge is a foe of this system of commerce and profit, run amok. The only education that can be permitted is if it acculturates to the status quo, as happens in the expensive schools, or if it produces people to police and enforce the status quo, as in the state school where I teach. [Bohne, 'Learning to be stupid in the culture of cash,' 2003]

Consider now the case of India. Here the BJP government set about to systematically re-write textbooks as part of their fascist political agenda: According to the historian Tanika Sarkar:

'A lot of Indian intellectuals dismiss the massive interventionism of the Sangh in education as 'a mere diversion from real issues and problems that have resulted from the all-too-obvious failures of BJP governance. This is perfectly true, but it overlooks the real strength of their educational plan. For issues and problems will become operationally "real" only when they are widely recognised to be vital concerns, while non-issues also need to be interpreted as secondary or marginal. And that does not happen instinctively, automatically, but only through long and systematic training, through education. For decades now, the RSS has been imparting an education that confuses perceptions of the real and the contrived. It has taught that patriotism is vengeance, that the nation is Hindu, that struggles for human rights and equality and social justice are alien to our culture, they are divisive and they are the fruits of Macaulay's poison tree. In the BJP-run States, school textbooks have sections glorifying the Pokhran tests. The RSS has insisted that we only look for knowledge that is home-grown, however offensive or exploitative that might be to Dalits, to women, to democracy. As important as what it teaches is what it silences and renders non-issue. It suppresses knowledge about what lies behind Indian poverty, it displaces discussions on what is welfare and social justice and how to attain them. The new educational suggestions and policy guidelines are essential to achieve a confusion of priorities on a nationwide scale. A regimentation of knowledge and a suppression of critical enquiry have proceeded for a long time through specifically RSS agencies. This will continue unabated even if their drastic misgovernance temporarily robs the BJP of state power. Any effective ideological challenge to the Sangh Parivar must confront the fascisation of society and not just the fascisation of the state.' [Sarkar, THE HINDU, November 24, 1998]

Again, with the coming to power of the BJP led governments in 1998 and 1999, “Murli Manohar Joshi a long-term RSS member and BJP minister for human resource development with responsibility for education, instigated proposals for changes in school textbooks to reflect the Hindutva world view as well as proposals ‘to amend the right to education of minorities.’ (Hindustan Times, 21 Oct 1998). The changes were intended to make the primary and secondary school curricula ‘Indianized,’ ‘nationalized,’ and ‘spiritualized.” [Bhatt, Hindu nationalism 2001, p.206]

In Pakistan, too, the situation regarding educational content leaves much to be desired and has been aggravated particularly after the Zia interregnum 1977-88. A study of curricular content reveals that:

Human rights issues are not incorporated in the curricula in a systematic and coherent manner and referred to mostly in passing. The books being taught in the subjects of Social Studies and Pakistan Studies have less human rights content even as compared to the subject of Islamiyat where there are references, for instance, to *Huqooq-ul-Ebad* (rights of other human beings) along with *Huqooq-ullah* (rights of God).

The textbooks’ contents are by and large generalized sermons of virtues and do not comment on serious social issues such as gender inequalities, instances of honour killing, bonded labour and other inequities and violations of human rights that remain apart of the system. The Constitution of the country, too, is seldom invoked. For instance most children would be unaware, even having gone to school, that the constitution forbids the employment of any child below the age of 14 in any factory or mine or any hazardous activity. [Ahmed in ed., Nayyar and Salim, *The Subtle Subversion*, p. 116-118]

It is a narrow and doctrinaire version of Islam that finds its way into madrassas and public sector schools, poles apart from the vision of the country’s founder, Muhammed Ali Jinnah. This is what he had to say in his inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August, 1947:

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state....Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.”

However, the education system came to be regarded as key in creating a sense of solidarity on the basis of religion among the ethnically and culturally diverse population of the new state. In the First Educational Conference called by the government in 1947, the federal minister of education underscored the need for an educational system based on Islamic ideology. The Second Five-year plan (1960-65) again emphasized Islamic studies and religious education. Mainstream education in Pakistan remains dominantly within the public sector at all levels even though elite institutions are much more likely to be found within the private sector. The curriculum for the large number of public sector institutions, including approximately 125,000 schools, is given final approval by the Curriculum Wing of the Federal Ministry of Education. The textbooks commissioned by the provincially based textbook boards adhere to guidelines laid down by the Curriculum Wing. These guidelines repeatedly emphasize the need to inculcate a narrowly defined set of Islamic values.

The emphasis on Islamic studies became much more pronounced after General Zia ul Haq's coup in 1977. Islamiyat had been a compulsory subject from Class I up to Class X but it was now made compulsory up to B.A. (Bachelor of Arts degree equivalent to 14 years of schooling). It is not required at the M.A. level, but when students appear in professional examinations such as MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine Bachelor of surgery) or CSS (competitive examinations for the Federal civil services) they again have to study Islamiyat as a separate subject and can qualify only if they pass in this exam as well. Under Zia, from Class VI

to Class VIII, it was made compulsory for students of all religions to learn Arabic. The justification was that this would enable Muslim students to acquire a better comprehension of Quranic teachings. Previously, Arabic had been an optional subject. During the same period, a section of the Islamiyat syllabus was separated for *Sunnis* and *Shias* at the level of Class IX and X. Separate books were introduced for students of the two sects but a common book was re-introduced in 1999. However, they attempt distinct sections of the examination paper. From Class I to Class VIII the subject of Diniyat (Religious Studies) was taught in government schools. But, in 1997, the subject of Islamiyat (Islamic Studies) was introduced. [Kodelja and Bassler, Religion and Schooling in Open Society, 2004]

Clearly a narrow focus on religion becomes divisive. But, is the essential problem that of religion or of the way it is taught in school and one privileged over the other? There are no easy answers to this but Professor Richard Falk makes an interesting argument in his recent book about the place of religion in a postmodern world that suggests shifting the focus to the content of religious education as opposed to debating its place in the system:

'The complexity and precariousness of a globalizing world is bringing into being an unprecedented degree of global governance. The forms of this governance cannot be understood by reference to the United Nations, but are related above all to the efforts of the market forces to coordinate and stabilize their operations on a regional and global basis, and to some extent by their geopolitical allies, especially the United States, which provides protection via global policing mechanisms, the extension of this type of global governance , especially as abetted by empire building designs , threaten human well-being and quality of social and political life at the level of the state. The religious challenge is to infuse the struggles of the peoples of the world for democracy, equity and sustainability with a vision of human existence that is human-centered yet conscious of the relevance of a surrounding nature , of the sacred and of mysteries beyond the grasp of reason and machines. In a sense, religion remains the best and primary custodian of pre-modern

wisdom that was almost entirely forgotten throughout the experience of modernity, and is also the best receptor for transition to a fulfilling experience of post-modernity.' [Falk, The declining world order, p.164-165]

Contextualizing rights

In the post-World War II global environment the United Nations has been a key codifier of the universal rights regime, setting norms for nation states that most have accepted in theory, sought to modify in their respective national contexts and observed as much in the breach as in practice. That in the post-cold war setting the institution of the UN has not exactly gained in prestige by a perceived association with an aggressive US state policy may not represent a significant problem at the state level where considerations of realpolitik prevail in any case but at the level of society the issue becomes problematic.

Clearly, in laying down international the norms the UN continues to play an important role. But, we must be conscious, too, of the powerful political, economic and cultural forces that lend strength and vitality in society to an 'us' vs. 'them' dynamic across divides of economic disparity, negative nationalism, essentialist ethnicity and sectarianism and so on. A sense of siege at the national or sub-national level often encouraged by governing elites is not the best societal setting for either the assertion of one's own rights or recognizing those of others. For the internalization of a rights education that serves to accomplish both it is necessary that education serve to reaffirm in history and culture the universalist aspects of a peoples' own experience. In the Muslim majority societies of today, for instance, it is important to invoke the traditions and frameworks of pluralism of which such societies are legatees in an historical and regional context. The confidence and self-respect so generated provides an enabling context for rights accorded and sought.

Earlier in this paper I cited Professor Sen identifying three strands of contextualization: a reconnect with and celebration of past, universalist achievements, emphasis on the individual's multiple identities and a broadening of horizons so that the focus is not on the self to an obsessive degree. In a slightly different vein Professor Krishna Kumar, head of India's National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) spoke of his organization's attempt at contextualizing school texts at a lecture last year in Lahore:

We make Geography, Civics and Social Sciences and Environmental Sciences come alive by contextualizing every thing in the daily ethos...the aim of these textbooks is to make children think.'

To make ourselves think or rather re-think the larger picture, then, is a crucial element of the enterprise.

For Pakistan, too, the challenge is very similar. An environment dominated by security/ideological concerns, owing to an adversarial relationship with a much larger neighbour, coupled with the use of a narrow and exclusivist version of Islam by vested interests for defining the ideological parameters of state and society, did not provide a conducive setting for the promotion of human rights. At this point what children are taught appears to suffer from the following distortions:

- Factual inaccuracies and insensitivity to the existing religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation
- Perspectives that encourage bigotry, prejudice and discrimination towards fellow citizens, especially women, and religious minorities and other nations.
- Omission of concepts and material that could encourage critical self-awareness among students.

However, the society has deep within its historical memory assets of humanism, tolerance and pluralism that are often overlooked even as they continue to play a key role in the orientation and behaviour of the great majority. The issue is one of

identifying what these are and reinforcing their contemporary relevance through reclaiming the past. For the glory of the past—and hence the pride that a people may take in it—surely lies most particularly in the collective memory of traditions of coexistence, pluralism and civilizational convergence and enrichment.

One approach adopted by Civil Society Organizations is to ensure that people are familiar with the rights that are their due under the Constitution as well as by dint of multilateral agreements to which the government of Pakistan has become a signatory. Organizations such as SAHE, for instance, produce manuals highlighting these aspects for the teachers and students at its community-based schools. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Shirkat Gah, Aurat, Simorgh, Book Club, DCHD, SPARC and many other civil society organizations are committed to human rights education and among other things collaborate with the government to provide training to various departments including the police. Similarly, the Institute of Educational Development, Aga Khan University, Karachi, has introduced an Education for Citizenship program and is developing modules that can be used by other teachers as a teaching resource. In our view, however, an area that needs to be further strengthened also is that of an enabling context for human rights education. Certainly, such a context is provided by a democratic dispensation, whose absence makes the task that much harder. Though, as we have most recently witnessed in the case of the United States, the deliberate engendering of a siege mentality that one could call a disabling context can render citizens insensitive to the rights of others as well as far less assertive of their own rights. The primary task therefore, for us has been to invite a re-think of closely held assumptions, views and attitudes by inviting participants to join us in a trek through history, focus particularly on key turning points and refer as often as possible in order to maintain credibility only to original documents and undisputed record. We would argue, in other words, for an approach that emphasizes integrating the messages of tolerance, pluralism and inclusivity into the more conventional areas of study such as language,

history, civics and religious education in tandem with the effort to render the study of human rights as a mainstream discipline.

To illustrate the approach by way of an example, a book recently produced by SAHE carries an approximately 100-page chronology that students and teachers appear to find useful in the context of Pakistan Studies, a subject taught at different school and college-levels. The chronology aims to provide a broad perspective:

It includes numerous references that highlight civilizational, historical and cultural antecedents that focus attention on Pakistan's plural and tolerant heritage and seek to distinguish between traditional accommodation at the popular level and contrived antagonism for political ends; While secularism is under virulent attack in Pakistan, the book starts with the speech to the Constituent Assembly made by Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which stands as a testimony to his belief that in the new country religion would not be the business of the state; An article on Pakistan's territorial congruence with the Indus Valley civilization suggests the lack of conflict between Islam as a marker of identity and secular nationalism; Within Islam, the highlighting of the role of the Sufis who espoused a universalist creed at the popular level in the local idiom as compared to the legist and doctrinaire tradition that extremism seeks to build upon. Even today, the shrines of these sufi saints are sites of veneration by followers of more than one religion; Highlighting the contributions of citizens and groups of different religious backgrounds, women and dissidents in order to drive home the point that the issue is not one of mere 'tolerance,' but of recognizing how crucial everyone is to the enterprise of nation, state and society and placing due premium on their respective contributions in different spheres; Revisiting the past in order also to highlight instances of gross human rights violations usually ignored in school texts such as in the 1971 war that saw Bangladesh come into being.

In a similar vein, another book that SAHE has commissioned focuses on highlighting different aspects of the city of Lahore and its society in an historical context. While this will simply take the shape of interesting narratives about Lahore's people and places, it will, in the process, highlight a rich and plural past and the diverse set of contributors from many different religious and cultural backgrounds who helped build Lahore's physical infra structure as well its cultural ethos. The re-appropriation of this rich legacy of pluralism is important for the providing of an enabling context.

To recap briefly, I am arguing for the need to provide and deepen an enabling context for human rights education: by raising consciousness about our multiple identities; reclaiming the past for retrieving traditions of humanism, plurality and engagement; being more aware of society's resources of culture and memory that are often ignored in the discourse of modernity; recognizing that in the attempt to change attitudes and mind-sets we may have to go beyond providing information and even analysis, vital as these are. And, working on innovations that will generate greater interest and response; focusing, too, on understanding the world-view and perspective of those whose attitude and practice we seek to change so that the message addresses their concerns and has a greater chance of being internalized.

References:

1. Amartya Sen: The importance of basic education Excerpted from Amartya Sen's speech to the Commonwealth education conference, Edinburgh , Tuesday October 28, 2003
2. Shulz, William, Tainted Legacy, Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003
3. Janusz Symonides, Human Rights: New Dimensions and Challenges, UNESCO 1998
4. Apple, Michael. W Ideology and Curriculum, RoutledgeFalmer, New York, 2004
5. Luciana Bohne, 'Learning to be stupid in the culture of cash,' 2003, marchforjustice.com
6. THE HINDU, Tuesday, November 24, 1998, opinion section
7. Bhatt, Chetan, Hindu nationalism: origins, ideologies and modern myths, 2001, p.206
8. Syed Jaffar Ahmed, The Subtle Subversion: the state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan (Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics), SDPI (Islamabad), 2004
9. Kodelja and Bassler, Religion and Schooling in Open Society, OSI, Slovenia, 2004, Annex C
10. Falk, Richard. A, The Declining World Order: America's Imperial Geopolitics, Routledge: New York, 2004 p.164-165
11. Rahman, T, Denizens of alien worlds: A study of education, inequality and polarization in Pakistan, OUP, 2004
12. Saigol, Rubina , Symbolic violence: Curriculum, pedagogy and society, SAHE, 2000
13. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the mid-term global evaluation of the progress made towards the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights education (1995-2004), 2000 A/ 55/360
14. UNESCO, Human Rights Education at the heart of quality education: A rights based approach to quality education. Unesco.org/education/en/ev.php