

Research articles

From vision to transformation: integrating human rights courses in higher education in India

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Abstract

Human Rights Education (HRE) is critical to human development and societal transformation. In India, although HRE emerged in the 1980s, its incorporation in higher education has not yet reached its full potential. Using the state of Tamil Nadu as our case study, this paper evaluates the integration of courses on human rights in universities and colleges, using a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse the nature and content of such courses, their compliance with India's apex institutional directives, and the challenges faced. The researchers conclude that there is a disconnect between the vision of policy makers and actual implementation of HRE in practice. It is suggested that wider holistic application of HRE in higher education is needed, so that learning becomes a transformative force, empowering the young to develop attitudes of solidarity, tolerance, and respect for social justice.

Keywords

Human rights, higher education, Tamil Nadu, India, inequality, learning outcomes

Introduction

Ideally, human rights as a comprehensive value system should be the guiding force of societies. However, millions of people all over the world continue to struggle for a dignified existence. This is further intensified in a heterogeneous society like India, with diversity in language, region, race, caste, culture and religion (Kosir & Lakshminarayanan, 2021) contributing to blatant discrimination. Considerably influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the Indian constitution aims to safeguard the rights of all citizens. It includes fundamental rights (Part III) that guarantee equality, freedom, rights against discrimination, freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights, and the right to constitutional remedies. A section on directive principles of state policy (Part IV) to ensure socio-economic justice is also incorporated. Following the passing of the Protection of Human Rights Act (National Human Rights Commission, 1993), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commissions (SHRC) were created to promote and protect human rights. National commissions for protection of the rights of women, children, minorities, 'backward classes', scheduled castes, and tribes were also established. While the constitution and apex institutions provide a 'stated vision' for human rights practice in India, the actual transformation of society to reflect this vision has been slow and fragmented. Real social transformation requires the fundamental acceptance that all human beings are entitled to a life of dignity and equal opportunity, which can only be achieved through education that endows 'human beings with the power to resist colonization of the mind' (Baxi, 1994, p. 23).

After independence, the Indian government provided considerable impetus for higher education. The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in 1956 for coordination and standardisation within universities and delineation of national policies on education. Recently, in consonance with the global agenda for sustainable development 2030- Goal 4 (UN, n.d.), the Indian government adopted the National Education Policy (NEP) (2020). It aimed to build a 'knowledge society', in which equity and inclusion would be ensured through sensitisation towards human values, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, and community participation. The NEP envisages privatization of higher education, increased governmental financing, and multidisciplinary universities with holistic, flexible, imaginative, research-oriented curricula and active learning (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). While the NEP aims at structural, operational and financial reforms to the Indian educational structure, critics question the absence of clear strategies on state funding for institutions and fear that privatization could further aggravate the socio-economic divide. The greatest challenge is to translate these '2D plans onto the 3D world' (Sarna, Puri & Kochar, 2020). Such restructuring requires effective integration of the stated vision of policy makers with actual course content.

Human Rights Education (HRE) enables skills of advocacy through negotiation, mediation, and consensus building (Andreopoulos, 1997, pp. 265-267). It facilitates ending the vicious cycle of 'humiliation of humans by humans' (Mohanty, 2000, p. 64), by giving the oppressed an understanding of their rights, and the oppressors a consciousness of their wrongs. It is here that Tamil Nadu (TN), in South India, presents a dichotomy; despite many educational institutions and high literacy rates, human rights abuses continue to prevail, implying a disconnect between the vision of policy makers and the effective integration of HRE in academic contexts.

Conceptual framework

Tamil Nadu, a leading educational hub in India, has many educational institutions with programmes in technology, engineering, medicine, arts, sciences, and law. Since social sciences aim to foster global citizenship and holistic values, HRE is incorporated in political science, history, sociology, anthropology, economics, and law departments.

This paper seeks to evaluate the incorporation of HRE in arts and science institutions in TN. Through comparison and correlation, the contents of these courses were analysed with reference to their compliance with recommendations of the NHRC-2007 and the UGC, X and XI plan guidelines for HRE. We asked the following research questions;

1. What is the nature of the human rights courses and the focus of their syllabus content?
2. Are the human rights courses offered in major colleges and universities in TN compliant with the recommendations of the NHRC and the UGC?
3. What are the challenges to the introduction and effective implementation of the recommended human rights curricula, courses and pedagogies in TN?

Methodology

Through collecting information directly from faculty or from institutional websites, we studied the syllabi of 11 universities and 158 arts and science colleges in TN. Of the arts and science colleges, 27 were government or constituent colleges, 28 were government-aided and 103 were self-financing. These comprised some 20% of the existing arts and science colleges in TN. In our study, the syllabi content was analysed and compared with the original curriculum guidelines of the UGC and NHRC to make valid inferences regarding what was included or excluded and put forth recommendations that correlate with the grassroot social realities. The study used a qualitative, descriptive method to analyse the syllabi content and relevant documents, after which interviews were conducted through personal communication with select faculty members teaching human rights. Forty faculty members were interviewed, of

whom ten were male and thirty female. The interviewees had no hesitation in providing informed consent to use their responses as personal communication and, wherever cited, pseudonyms are used to maintain research confidentiality. The Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 11) model of data analysis was used, through the following stages: 1. Data reduction (to sort, select, simplify, focus, and discard data so that final conclusions can be drawn); 2. Data display (an organized, compressed, and meaningful assembly of information); 3. Conclusion drawing and verification which involves stepping back to consider the meaning of the analysed data and assess their implications for the research questions.

In qualitative inquiry and analysis, there is a crucial need for honesty and reflection on the analytic process on the part of the researcher. This human factor is the methodology's greatest strength, as well as its fundamental weakness (Patton, 1990, p. 372). In this study, the researchers began analysis in tandem with data collection, making regular field notes with comments and interpretations, independently at first and later correlating through discussion, which facilitated objective reflection and exchange. The most advantageous aspect of qualitative enquiry was that it enabled us to smoothly move on from drawing conclusions to making recommendations within the context of the study.

Human rights in India

Although the term 'human rights' originated in the west, conceptual rudiments of human dignity can be traced to ancient Indian *vedic* texts which point to an 'obligation-predicated society' that advocated 'compassion towards the weak' (Kumar & Choudhury, 2021; Baboo, 2016). Later, rigid caste protocols emerged, creating an exploitative system of stratification wherein social status depended on caste (Rawat, 2014; Chakravarti, 1993; Deshpande, 2010) and perpetuated unequal access to wealth and power (Cox, 1945). By the 19th century, reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Gandhi, and Ambedkar criticised religious bigotry, harassment of widows, and untouchability. However, caste, gender inequalities, and abuse of power continue to this day.

Although *caste inequalities* may not be overtly observed in everyday interactions in modern India and there is greater freedom of choice in education and careers (Velassery, 2005, pp. 7-8), they are practiced in overt and nuanced contexts. In arranged marriages, caste adjustments are often made, commensurate with education, career, and financial standing (Netting, 2010; Rajadhyaksha & Bhatnagar, 2000), or counterbalanced through 'bridegroom price', a veiled cash payment to the groom's household (Caplan, 1984). Caste remains an 'under-recognized marker of inequalities', witnessed in slum eviction (Ranganathan, 2021) and housing discrimination (Bharathi et al., 2020). In rural India, overt discrimination is often seen in denied access to public wells, punishments, and 'honour killings'. The government has a policy of

'reservations', which is intended to increase the representation of under-represented groups in education, legislative assemblies, and employment (Laskar, 2010). This policy is aimed to bring about socio-economic development. However, instead of privileged communities losing influence, the list of reserved communities has consistently swelled.

Gender Inequalities: With rapid urbanisation, Indian women aspire to academic and career advancement. However, they remain bound by societal constraints (Chaturvedi & Sahai, 2019) and the World Bank (2020) estimates that female labour participation rate in India fell to 20.3% in 2019 from 26% in 2005. Restrictive norms, a gender wage gap, and the lack of safe and flexible work choices impede the full realisation of Indian women's potential.

Abuse of Power: Blatant police brutality and extrajudicial killings are recorded in India, mainly in Jammu and Kashmir, the North Eastern states, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Haryana (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Harassment of activists, social workers, lawyers, and journalists through draconian sedition and counter-terrorism laws restrict free expression (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The increasing polarization triggered by *Hindutva* politics has resulted in the targeting of vulnerable minorities (*The politics of Hindutva*, 2020).

Human rights in Tamil Nadu

In classical Tamil Sangam society, social justice was the responsibility of rulers, as validated by ancient texts. The *Thirrukkural* urged kings to remain impartial (Gautam, 2021). The *Tolkappiyam* mentions a four-fold stratification of society: *arasar* (rulers), *anthanar* (priests), *vaniyar* (merchants), and *vellalar* (agriculturists). However, this was largely an occupational division (Kuppuswamy, 1978). Later, caste segregation and heredity norms elevated certain professions while denigrating others (Dhanabal, 2018). Under the *Chola* rule, there existed *vadangai* (right hand) and *idangai* (left hand) groups, and some *idangai* castes were deprived of education, land rights, and temple entry (Hanumanthan, 1976). This segregation was exploited by the British, who relegated natives to 'black town' in Chennai (Basu, 1993), where areas were demarcated on the basis of caste (Srinivasachari, 1930).

In TN, there are references to competent queens like Lokamahadevi (Mukund, 1992) and Rani Mangammal (Bes, 2018), as well as educated women like Andal (Soundaryarajan, 2019), but this was rare. The devadasi system in *Chola* and *Pallava* times refers to talented women in temple service, but when temples lost their economic status, *devadasis* were often forced into prostitution (Singhal, 2015; Venkataraman, 2018). In the 20th century, the self-respect movement gained momentum and reformists like Rettaimalai Srinivasan, Subramanya Bharti, and M. C. Rajah advocated against upper caste hegemony and discrimination against women (Rajan, 2020). However, caste, gender inequalities, and abuse of power still prevail in TN.

Caste Inequalities: TN has recorded atrocities against *dalit* castes, who constitute 21% of the population (Prabhu, 2017; Kannaiah, 2021). There were 192 ‘honour killings’ in TN between 2014 and 2019 (Tamilarasu, 2019). The practice of the *two-tumbler* system (separate drinking glasses) and *dalits* being denied access to public water tanks have also been reported in villages (“We have separate tumbler”, 2019, June 16).

Gender Inequalities: TN has recently witnessed a declining female sex ratio, an increase in domestic violence, and a decrease in female labour participation. There are records of female foeticide, infanticide, and disappearance of female children (‘Female foeticide’, 2022, January 6). The National Family Health Survey (2021) reported that 38.1% of women in TN in the 18-49 age group had experienced domestic violence. The female labour force participation rate in TN declined to 35.1% (rural) and 23.6% (urban) in 2019, (IWWAGE, 2021), indicating major socio-economic challenges.

Abuse of Power: According to the National Crime Records Bureau (2018), 70 custodial deaths were reported in 2018, of which 12 were in TN. The recent custodial deaths of a father and son in Sattankulam indicate grave violations by policepersons (Vijay Kumar & Sudhakar, 2020). Thus, abuse of power, societal intolerance, and rising xenophobia remain major concerns in TN.

Development of HRE in India

In a democracy where gender discrimination and caste-based atrocities continue despite legislation, HRE is necessary to address the social, cultural and political factors that foster such discrimination (Kapoor, 2007). However, in India a complex relationship exists between religious beliefs, cultural norms, and human rights practice, which adversely impacts effective HRE (Wahl, 2013). While there is considerable research on human rights violations in India (Beer & Mitchell, 2006; D’cruz & Banerjee, 2020; Kamboj, 1994; Naik, 2018; Saini, 2013), there is a limited focus on practices of HRE.

Addressing human rights teaching in schools, Panda (2001) and Bajaj (2011a) highlight the role of teacher training and textbooks with contextualised content as prerequisites for effective HRE in India. Bajaj (2011b) highlights different adaptive instructional practices of HRE in NGO models. Studying the operation of HRE in 4,000 schools, Bajaj (2011c, pp. 28-49) suggests that international mandates and grassroots activism should work together for successful implementation of HRE in policy, pedagogy and practice. These studies highlight the need for a rights-based approach based on collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations (Ashifa, 2021), and the extension of HRE from the level of school into higher education for a transformative convergence of human rights policy and discourse (Bajaj, 2017, p. 161).

Some researchers focus on students' knowledge of human rights (Selvam, 2018) and reiterate that governmental efforts have not yielded adequate results, thus validating the need to build strong, inclusive systems (Kohama, 2012) through interdisciplinary education (Alam & Halder, 2018; Kaushik, Kaushik & Kaushik, 2006; Sharma, 2002). Nadkarni and Sinha (2016) have studied curriculum design, research and field practice in social work departments and advocate additional human rights perspectives. While HRE has largely been the monopoly of social work and social science programmes, some academics question the very future of social science (Benjamin, 2009) and social work courses (Nair, 2014, p. 253), since their sustainability is impeded by lack of adequate career opportunities, funding, and quality research in India.

Kumar (2019) has undertaken a comprehensive study on the status of HRE in higher educational institutions in India and recommended the need for increased financing, revision of curricula, and updated training programmes. While most researchers emphasise the need for HRE to redress abuses and there have been some studies on HRE in schools, the detailed study of human rights courses in colleges and universities is limited, and there is a need for wider empirical research that will assist the strategic planning and implementation of HRE, especially in some states.

Indian HRE has been developed in tandem with the socio-political process of nation-building. In 1985, the UGC-appointed Sikri Commission (2007) released a blueprint for teaching human rights in colleges, universities, and adult educational centres. In the 1990s the Indian Institute of Human Rights was launched to disseminate awareness, training, and research in human rights and a national curriculum framework was recommended by NHRC to sensitise individuals involved in NGOs, universities, and law enforcement sectors, through workshops (National Human Rights Commission, 2008). In 1997, the UGC constituted the Simhadri Committee to develop a conceptual framework for HRE in universities. This prompted many universities to incorporate HRE. Jawaharlal Nehru University (n.d) started a Centre for Human Rights Teaching and Research with elective courses at the PG level, Jamia Milia Islamia (n.d) started an MA in Human Rights and Duties, Benaras Hindu University (n.d) incorporated Human Rights in BA and MA law programmes, and Indira Gandhi National Open University (n.d) established certificate courses in human rights. The UGC X plan guidelines (2002-2007) introduced two courses: Human Rights and Duties Education, and Promotion of Ethics and Values. The UGC XI plan extended this into three courses: Human Rights and Duties; Human Rights and Values; and Human Rights and Human Development (University Grants Commission, 2002; 2007). UGC guidelines also identified a number of courses (at foundation, certificate, diploma, UG, and PG levels), workshops and publications for financial support. (University Grants Commission, 2011, pp. 260-262)

Although universities initiated many such courses, possibly due to UGC funding, there were

wide disparities in their ideological and structural approaches (Bajaj, 2017, pp. 162-164), particularly in their visions of critical pedagogy and the degree to which they emphasised tolerance, mutual respect, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills (Cargas & Mitoma, 2019). Reviewing the syllabi, the NHRC observed that existing courses provided limited job prospects, lacked research elements, and were ‘law-centric rather than society-oriented’, with limited linkages with ground realities. It called for the inclusion of human rights courses across various disciplines (Table 1) and provided a detailed curriculum (National Human Rights Commission, 2007).

Table 1

NHRC and UGC Recommendations for HRE in Universities. Source: Adapted from recommendations of National Human Rights Commission (2007, 27-75) and UGC guidelines (University Grants Commission, 2002; 2017).

Programme suggestions	Content Suggestions
UG Foundation Course: Human Rights	7 units: values, norms, implementation, field work/project
Certificate/Diploma: Human Rights	International and national issues
PG Diploma: Human Rights	Human rights and duties, national and international perspectives, field work
BA: Human Rights	International dimensions, theoretical aspects, norms and mechanisms, rights and duties, field work, dissertation
MA: Human Rights	Historical/philosophical, international/regional perspectives, societal issues, duties-India, research methodology, field work, dissertation, viva voce Optional: human rights: science & technology, international obligations, trade, refugee laws, self-determination, women, children, aged, disabled, socially & economically disadvantaged, working class, minorities, criminal justice system, environment, social movements

Table 1 evidences that NHRC suggested a foundational course in human rights and values, across all disciplines. Certificate and diploma courses were recommended for lawyers, police, doctors, and teachers who could influence human rights practice. Recommendations were also made to include theoretical and practical components in degree courses.

In 2018, the UGC also prepared a Learning Outcomes Curriculum Framework (LOCF) for Human Rights (University Grants Commission, 2019, which advocated flexibility in learning and teaching pedagogies to enable students to apply theory and practice, through research and professional collaboration. It recommended a PG course in human rights, with an emphasis on historical and philosophical perspectives, research-based human rights advocacy, critical analysis, and digital literacy. Thus, there has been a growing momentum to develop a long-term strategy for HRE.

Findings

Higher education in Tamil Nadu

The TN Department of Higher Education aims to transform young people by fostering access, equity, and global competencies through institutions of 'innovation, excellence and development' (Government of Tamil Nadu, n.d.) (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2

Statistics of Higher Education Institutions. Data correlated from All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Category	All India	In Tamil Nadu
Number of universities	1043	59
Number of colleges (private and government)	42343	2610
Number of standalone institutions	11779	914
Gross enrolment ratio (18-23 Years)	27.1%	51.4%
	Males: 26.9%	Males: 51.8%
	Females 27.3%	Females: 51%

Table 2 reflects the existence of many higher educational institutions in TN and indicates the higher gross enrolment ratio and gender parity of enrolled students, compared to the national level.

Table 3

Colleges per Population and Student Enrolment (2016-2020). Data correlated from All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Year	Total colleges: TN	Total colleges: India	Colleges per 100,000 population: TN	Colleges per 100,000: India	Average enrolment per college: TN	Average enrolment per college: India
2016-2017	2368	40026	33	28	922	659
2017-2018	2472	39050	35	28	919	698
2018-2019	2466	39931	35	28	914	693
2019-2020	2610	42343	38	30	872	680

Table 3 compares the number of colleges per head and average enrolment per college in TN against the national level. Between 2016 and 2020 TN had a considerably higher number of colleges per population of 100,000 as well as higher average enrolment per college than the national average. This validated the greater impetus given to higher education in TN.

The TN Department of Higher Education is bifurcated: the Directorate of Collegiate Education (n.d) aims to develop high-quality ethical professionals, while the Directorate of Technical Education (n.d) seeks to produce ‘competent, dynamic and entrepreneurial technical manpower’. In 1992, the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (n.d) (TANSCHÉ) was established to coordinate between the UGC and state universities. Apart from institutions for engineering, technology, teacher education and medical sciences, there are at present 784 arts and science colleges in TN, including 131 government and constituent colleges, 139 government-aided colleges and 514 self-financing ones (Directorate of Collegiate Education, n.d), where HRE has been partially initiated.

Development of HRE in Tamil Nadu

In reaction to grave violations and abuses recorded by NGOs in Tamil Nadu, the Human Rights Institute (Chennai) was formed in 1993. Its purpose was to link different groups: human rights academics, activists, government administrators, and citizens (Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation, n.d). In 1995, People’s Watch, (n.d), (Madurai) was established; this organisation has engaged in direct action, legal support, and training and education against abuse and discrimination.

In the 1990s, institutions like Stella Maris College (SMC) and Loyola College (Chennai), Holy

Cross Convent (Trichy) and Government Arts College (Salem) introduced human rights at the UG level. Human rights was included in the MA International Studies programme at SMC and as an introductory course in the BA History programme at Women's Christian College (WCC). Subsequently, the social work departments at Loyola College and SMC introduced human rights in their MA programmes. Ethiraj College was among the first institutions to initiate an MA in Human Rights and Duties Education (Table 4).

Table 4

Colleges with Human Rights-Specific Programmes in TN in 2020-2021. Adapted from syllabi collected from colleges in the case study.

College	Government Arts College	Ethiraj College for Women	Pachaiyappa's College
UG degree	NA	NA	NA
PG degree	<p><i>MA Human Rights</i></p> <p>Historical development, Indian constitution, criminal justice administration, women's rights, media, cyber issues, biomedical ethics, advocacy, grievances, group rights, environment project: dissertation and viva voce</p>	<p><i>MA Human Rights</i></p> <p>Historical perspectives, constitution, legislation-India, group rights, criminal justice grievances, 4th estate, women's rights, research methodology, gender, NGOs, trends, biomedical ethics, peace & security, environment, cyber issues, international obligations, civil society, project, field work</p>	<p><i>MA Human Rights and Duties Education</i></p> <p>Historical development, UN and human rights, international bodies, rights of minorities, workers, children and consumers, project, field work</p>

Table 5

Universities with Human Rights-Specific Programmes in TN in 2020-2021. Adapted from syllabi collected from universities in the case study.

University	Annamalai University (distance learning)	Tamil Nadu Open University, (TNOU) (distance learning)	University of Madras, (distance learning)
UG degree	<i>BA Human Rights</i> Theories, societal issues-India, judiciary, media, culture, religion, protection, emerging trends	<i>BA Human Rights</i> Theories, social movements, Indian constitution, global perspectives, environment, activism, NGOs, judiciary, media, trade, police, criminal justice	NA
PG degree	<i>MA Human Rights</i> Theories, global/regional, culture, religion research methodology, societal trends, international relations, judiciary, media, peace, non- violence	<i>MA Human Rights</i> Theories, constitution- India, global perspectives, education, research methodology, societal problems, globalization, themes & issues, environment. Specialization: science, technology, marginalized, working class or project work	<i>MA Human Rights & Duties</i> Meaning, development, theories, human rights in Indian literature, statutory bodies, redressing violations, business, Indian constitution, labour rights, cyber, environment media, research methodology, contemporary issues

Table 5 indicates that two universities (Annamalai University and TN Open University) offer a BA degree in Human Rights through distance learning and six institutions have introduced MAs in Human Rights. Analysis of the course contents indicates that UG-level courses contain no practical aspects. In three PG programmes (Government Arts College-Salem, Ethiraj College-Chennai and Pachaiyappas College-Chennai) the project and field work components are mandatory, whereas they remain optional in TNOU, and unspecified in Annamalai and Madras universities, probably as these are distance learning programmes (Table 4).

A few institutions also offer human rights as elective or core courses, in various degree programmes (Table 6).

Table 6

Elective and Core Human Rights Courses in TN. Adapted from syllabi collected from universities and colleges in the case study.

Institution	Major Programme	Core/Elective	Syllabus Content
LN Government Arts College, Ponneri	MA History	Core	<i>Studies in Human Rights</i> Introduction, documents, India, minority rights
Government Arts College, Salem	MA Economics	Elective	<i>Studies in Human Rights</i> Historical evolution, civil/political/economic rights, minorities, violation
Government Arts College, Rasipuram	MA History, Political Science	Elective	<i>Human Rights</i> Definition, theories, international organizations, national/state commissions, minorities, challenges
Madurai Kamaraj University	MA Political Science	Core	<i>Human Rights</i> Definition, theories, UN documents, rights of women, children, consumers, minorities
	MA Criminal Justice and Victimology	Core	<i>Human Rights</i> Police, judiciary, correctional administration, victims, field visit
AM Jain College	BA Tourism & Travel Management	Elective	<i>Human Rights and Tourism</i> Evolution, UN documents, tourism, environment
	MA Tourism & Travel Management	Elective	<i>Human Rights and Tourism</i> Evolution, UN documents, tourism, environment
	BA Defense & Strategic Studies	Core	<i>Human Rights</i> Meaning, rights and abuses, international norms, UN, NHRC
	BA Criminology & Police Administration	Core	<i>Human Rights and Criminal Justice Administration</i> Definition, agencies, violations, custodial violence
University of Madras	MA Women's Studies, Sociology	Core	<i>Human Rights and Criminal Justice Administration</i>

Institution	Major Programme	Core/Elective	Syllabus Content
	MSc. Criminology & Criminal Justice		Definition, agencies, violations, custodial violence
	MA Political science	Elective	<i>Human Rights in India</i> Theories, constitution, UDHR, NHRC, SHRC, issues
University of Madras (Distance/Regular)	MA Public Administration, Public Policy, Developmental Administration	Core	<i>Human Rights Administration</i> Theories, constitution, administration, issues, development
University of Madras (Distance)	BA Criminology and Police Administration	Elective	<i>Human rights and Criminal Justice Administration</i> Definitions, legal instruments, protection, enforcement
	BA Historical studies	Elective	<i>Introduction to Human rights</i> Definition, UN docs, international organization, constitution
	BA Political Science	Core	<i>Human Rights in India</i> Origin, theories, constitution, administration, issues
	BA Public Administration	Core	<i>Human Rights Administration</i> Meaning, theories, categories, legal mechanisms, international covenants
Bharti Women's College	MA Historical Studies	Elective	<i>Human Rights</i> Definition, international documents, India, issues
Ethiraj College for Women	MA Tourism & Travel Management	Core	<i>Tourism and Human rights</i> Definitions, international covenants, fundamental rights, tourism, environment
Madras Christian College	MA History	Core	<i>Studies in Human Rights</i> Meaning, issues, India, women, child rights, NGOs
	MA Public Administration	Elective	<i>Human rights Administration</i> International legal framework, UDHR, NHRC and SHRC, rights – women/children/refugees/prisoners, NGOs, media and judiciary

Institution	Major Programme	Core/Elective	Syllabus Content
	MA Political Science	Core	<i>Human Rights</i> Concepts, covenants, challenges, responses, case studies

Table 6 indicates that human rights are offered as elective or core courses in history, political science, and public administration. Departments of Women's Studies, Criminology, Police Administration, Defence and Strategic Studies, and Travel and Tourism also offer human rights courses, although their content is more attuned to their respective majors. While human rights is offered in MA programmes as either core or electives, only a few BA programmes offer it. The rationale for this is perhaps that human rights requires a level of critical thinking more suited to the PG level.

Challenges for HRE in Tamil Nadu

HRE in Tamil Nadu is still at its nascent stage and faces immense challenges, as is evident from interviews with faculty members teaching these courses.

Non-Majors and Electives: Although some institutions incorporated human rights courses in history, sociology, and international studies programmes, these have remained non-major electives and very few were mandated as core curriculum (E. P., personal communication, January 15, 2021). Therefore, not all students will have been exposed to even basic human rights concepts when they graduate.

Syllabus Restructure: The curriculum restructure mandated every three years by the government has pressurised institutions to remove existing human rights courses, as they are not 'major core' ones and therefore 'expendable' (R. V., personal communication, January 22, 2021; B. P., personal communication, January 22, 2021; K. V., personal communication, January 23, 2021). At A. M. Jain College, the human rights course offered by the history department was removed during syllabus revision (S. A., personal communication, February 3, 2021). Syllabus restructuring at Loyola College, MCC and Bharati Women's College resulted in a shelving of human rights to accommodate core history courses at the UG level. There was pressure on government colleges to include courses listed under TANSCH, which mandates that 75% of courses should be from their core disciplines and that only 25% can be allied courses such as human rights (B. P., personal communication, January 22, 2021; S. S., personal communication, February 3, 2021; K. B., personal communication, January 21, 2021). These shifts in the government's curricular priorities adversely impacted private colleges; despite their good intentions, they were forced to either reduce human rights courses or completely abolish and replace them with 'core relevant' courses.

Funding and Supervision: UGC initially provided some financial funding for HRE. The Government Arts College (Salem) received governmental funding for its MA in Human Rights and Duties Education and this study, launched in 2018, is reportedly popular among students (S. K., personal communication, January 23, 2021). The Holy Cross College initiated an MA in Human Rights, collaborating with Henri Tiphange, a leading human rights advocate. Ethiraj College and Holy Cross College received initial UGC funding for five years, after which they became self-financing. This resulted in higher fees and a significant drop in student intake. In Ethiraj College, since 2007, the average annual student intake for the human rights programme has been only 15-16. (R.M., personal communication, January 15, 2021), while in Holy Cross there has been very low to zero student enrolment in some years (M. V., personal communication, January 16, 2021; K.D., personal communication, February 2, 2021). Thus, although most institutions introduced new courses when initial funding was allotted, these courses became unsustainable when funding ended. While the UGC had mandated six nodal centres of excellence to oversee HRE, to date only two exist and there are none in TN. The absence of adequate supervision and quality control, and the lack of funding, impede effective HRE.

A Dearth of Trained Professionals: The UGC allotted some funding for seminars, symposiums, workshops for curriculum development, training, and interdisciplinary programmes on human rights. While few institutions organise such events, attendance is not mandatory and therefore limited. It is seldom that specialised grassroot-level experts or researchers are at these workshops, and so, apart from providing theoretical input, their impact is negligible. (R. M., personal communication, November 20, 2021). The faculty teaching human rights are drawn from history, sociology, political science or public administration departments, mainly because these departments offer the courses. These faculty members lack practical field experience and related skill competencies, which limits a broader understanding of the human rights gamut.

Internship, Field Work and Case Studies: While a practical component is needed to ensure grassroot-level awareness, the mandatory NGO internships and field visits to police stations and detention centres were considered 'too dangerous and unsuitable' for girls by stakeholders at Holy Cross College, which resulted in negligible enrolment for their Human Rights MA (M.V., Personal Communication, January 15, 2021). Courses offered by the social work department include an experiential dimension through collaboration with NGOs that provides internships, and this exposure enables students to interact with marginalized communities and victims of abuse (L. M., personal communication, January 10, 2021, A. N., personal communication, January 12, 2021). NGOs such as Peoples Watch and Community Health Education Society (Chennai) provide internships for MA Human Rights students at Ethiraj College. NGOs that provide internships for students in the social work department

include the Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities, People's Union for Civil Liberties, the Human Rights and Advocacy Foundation, *Thozhamai*, the Human Rights Foundation (Chennai), and the Society for Community Organisation Trust (Madurai). Thus, human rights courses with a practical component have mainly been restricted to social work programmes.

Discussion

The dearth of focussed implementation of HRE across higher education in TN presents a paradox – although the state is a leading educational hub, very few institutions offer human rights courses. This suggests that HRE is not prioritised in TN, despite indications of unjust social practices and grave inequalities. It is this dichotomy that prompted this research on the incorporation of HRE in colleges and universities in TN, and we have sought to address the following research questions;

1. What is the nature of the human rights courses and the focus of their syllabus content?
2. Are the human rights courses offered in major colleges and universities in TN compliant with the recommendations of the NHRC and the UGC?
3. What are the challenges to the introduction and effective implementation of the recommended human rights curricula, courses and pedagogies in TN?

If we address research question 1, it is observed that while TN has established many higher educational institutions, HRE has a negligible presence in most campuses. In some colleges, courses were initiated as per UGC requirement; however, they have since been removed. While human rights-specific courses at the UG level are minimal, a few institutions have introduced them at the PG level. In most institutions, human rights is taught as an elective or core paper in the social science degree programmes. The syllabi focus of such courses is limited to basic global and national perspectives concerning historical evolution, constitutional rights, duties, and legislative safeguards.

When we consider research question 2, we see that although the NHRC recommended the incorporation of human rights at various levels and the UGC advocated a learning-outcome based approach, our study attests that very few universities in TN offer human rights-specific courses and most of these are not adequately structured, indicating a discrepancy with prescribed guidelines. Furthermore, human rights concepts are neither uniformly and holistically addressed nor adequately represented. The syllabi content reveals a lack of qualitative depth in terms of applicability and adaptability to contemporary contexts, as very few courses have research components, internships, fieldwork, or training. The NHRC guidelines mandate human rights as part of foundational value education (VE) programmes

across disciplines. However, this research reveals that the only institutions incorporating human rights into their VE programmes were Bharatiyar University, with a unit on values and human rights, Bharatidasan University, with a unit on human rights and organizations, AM Jain College, with a unit on human rights, and SMC, with a unit on rights-issues and challenges. Further, due to increasing demands to complete the core curriculum for mathematics and sciences, the hours allotted for VE are often converted to tutorial hours, which undermines the relevance of studying human rights.

When it comes to research question 3, there are innumerable challenges that impede the effective integration of human rights curricula, courses and pedagogies in TN. Limited or lapsed funding after initial grants has often resulted in increased fees and, subsequently, lower enrolment. The mandatory syllabus restructuring has forced institutions to introduce newer courses, thus devaluing the importance of HRE. While a few institutions introduced human rights as a major degree programme, in most it was relegated to a non-major elective. The practical component was mostly non-existent and in some cases where internships to juvenile centres and prisons were mandated, student enrolment was negligible due to security concerns.

Human rights are taught as core requirements in a few social science programmes at the PG level, while mostly relegated to electives at the UG level. The UGC mandate to incorporate human rights as VE has often been ignored. Thus, HRE is largely restricted to social sciences and is not part of foundational requirements across all programmes, as envisaged by the policy makers. Unless more universities introduce specialised courses in human rights that foster greater awareness within socio-economic, political, constitutional and environmental contexts, effective social transformation cannot take place.

A few institutions celebrate Human Rights Day and have human rights centres on campus; Lady Doak College, Madurai has formed a Centre for Rights-Based Activities and in SMC the 'UNICEF on Campus' and 'Girl Up Campaign' promote human rights through creative and engaging activities. However, such efforts are only viewed as frivolous government mandates that detract from core courses. It is vital to expose students to HRE at the UG level, as students in TN have a negligible awareness of human rights concepts or practice and, since most students do not opt for master's level education, it is only a small percentage of them that has any knowledge of human rights.

It is also necessary to balance HRE content with employment prospects. Professional courses like engineering and medicine are perceived as high value employment-generating courses, and there is less focus on the social sciences in general and human rights in particular (Sharma & Sharma, 2015). Therefore, students need orientation—effective academic and career

counselling—to encourage them to register for human rights courses.

Conclusion

The Indian constitution provides fundamental rights for all, yet a plethora of human rights abuses stem from inherent socio-economic inequality and prejudice. Sustaining a culture of human rights requires systemic HRE, so that everyone becomes conscious not only of their own rights but also their duty and responsibility to uphold the human rights of others. Within the Indian ethos, such transformation is only possible if every human being is sensitized to injustice. It is necessary to provide 'structures of accountability' (Sharma, 2002) to effectively integrate and implement HRE, by linking stated objectives and guidelines to what is actually taught.

This paper affirms that although the UGC and the NHRC have developed detailed guidelines, TN has failed to effectuate meaningful and transformational HRE. A majority of students in TN is poorly oriented about the dimensions of human rights, due to gaps in the effective translation of government policies into actionable course content. A dearth of trained professionals, lack of government funding, limited collaboration between academic institutions and NGOs, periodical syllabi restructuring, and a lack of career opportunities impede the sustainability of the human rights courses. These findings demonstrate the need for inclusion of human rights courses that meet qualitative content and assessment standards, across institutions. Further, diversified content needs to be explored, in terms of grassroots functionality, career prospects, practical training through field work, incorporation of case studies and project work in specific human rights areas. It is imperative to strategize how and where HRE can be incorporated and devise a mechanism to oversee its actual implementation.

The researchers note the lacuna in academic research on the impact and challenges of HRE. While this paper attempted to focus on the syllabi of human rights courses in arts and science institutions in TN, courses in law colleges, engineering, medical and teachers training colleges were not studied. In addition, prescribed textbooks and the content of teacher training programmes in HRE lie beyond the scope of this paper. These related areas could be investigated in the interest of better strategising and planning for HRE. Human rights should be incorporated not only in social sciences but integrated in foundational interdisciplinary courses across higher education. Only then can attitudes be transformed through a broader understanding of what human rights means and how it impacts.

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