

Role of Amnesty International in the Protection of Human Rights in India

Nirupama Elzabath K.

Political Science (NET Holder) Kattackayathu (H), Pala, Kottayam Dist. Kerala India

Abstract

India presents a complex picture with regard to human rights as the people of country are at various stages of development. Elements of the tribal society, agrarian society and industrial society have co-existed in the land and now elements of Post-industrial can also be seen. Each of these societies faces human rights problems of a different kind. In these circumstances, it is relevant to study the role of Amnesty international in the protection of human rights in India from 2010 to 2015. Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million people who campaign for the world where human rights are enjoyed by all. Amnesty is one of the largest and most active human rights organisations in the world with consultative status at the UN. It acts as a powerful pressure group in the field of human rights. It gained global attention due to it's voluntary nature, moral stance and marshalling of facts and figures. Amnesty International playing a significant role in the protection and promotion of human rights in India. Amnesty International conducts research and generates action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated in India.

KEYWORDS: Human rights, Non- Governmental Organisation, Amnesty International, Justice

INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are highly diverse groups of organisations engaged in a wide range of activities, and take different forms in different parts of the world. NGO's plays an important role to become a concrete expression of international, national, regional and local voice to assist and stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Amnesty International is a non-governmental organisation that works to protect human rights with more than 7 million people around the world. The objective of this organisation is to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights, and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated. Amnesty International established in 1961 by Peter Benenson in the United Kingdom. Throughout the 1990's, Amnesty International continued to grow in over 150 countries and territories. Regional office of the Amnesty International India works in Bangalore, which is a major hub for the investigations, campaigns and communications in India. Amnesty International plays a significant role in the protection of Human rights in India. Amnesty International investigates and exposes the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. They lobby government and other powerful groups such as companies making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. Amnesty International supports people to claim their rights through education and learning.

Objectives

- To find out the working of Amnesty International in the Protection of human rights in India from 2010 to 2015
- To identify the different areas of activity of the Amnesty international in India from 2010 to 2015
- To find out the role of Amnesty International in the Protection of Human rights in India from 2010 to 2015.

Historic Roots of Amnesty International

Amnesty International founded by a British lawyer, Peter Benenson in 1961. He had heard about two Portuguese men who were arrested and in the process of receiving seven year prison sentences for simply raising their glasses in a toast to freedom. As a result, he decided to take action on behalf of these prisoners. Benenson wrote an article titled, "The forgotten Prisoners", on May 21 1961, in the front page of the London Observer. This appeal stands against all people imprisoned because of peaceful expression of their beliefs, race religion, colour or national origin. He considered these people as, "prisoners of conscience". The Appeal for Amnesty reprinted in newspapers across the world, gained so much attention shows that people everywhere can unite in solidarity for justice and freedom. Peter Benenson said that "only when the last prisoner of conscience has been freed, when the last torture chamber has been closed, when the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a reality for the world's people, will our work be done". His action didn't just give birth to an extra ordinary movement; it was the start of an extra ordinary social change.

On 30th September 1962, the organisation officially named as 'Amnesty International'. Between the Appeal for Amnesty in 1961 and September 1962, the organisation had been simply known as 'Amnesty'. And Amnesty's membership increased from 15,000 in 1969 to 200,000 by 1979. This growth in resources enabled an expansion of its programme, "outside of the prison walls", to include work on disappearances, the death penalty and the rights of refugees. The "Urgent Action", a new technique aimed at mobilizing the membership into action rapidly was pioneered. The first was issued on 19th 1973. The organisation awarded Nobel prize for peace in 1977 for it's "campaign against torture" and the United Nations prize in the field of human rights in 1978.

Throughout the 1990's Amnesty International continued to grow, to the membership of over 7 million in 150 countries and territories led by Senegalese Secretary General, Pirre Sane. Amnesty continued to work on the wide range of events and world issues. After 2000, Agenda of Amnesty International turned to the challenges arising from the globalisation and the reaction to the 11 September 2001 attacks in United States. The issue of globalisation resulted a major shift in Amnesty International policy, and the scope of it's work was widened to include economic, social and cultural rights, an area that it had declined to work on in the past.

During the first half of the new decade, Amnesty International shifted it's concern to violence against women, controls on the world arms trade, concerns surrounding the effectiveness of the UN and ending torture.

There are six key areas which Amnesty International deals with are the following:

- a) Women's, children's, minorities and indigenous rights.
- b) Ending torture.

- c) Abolition of the death penalty.
- d) Rights of refugees.
- e) Rights of prisoners of conscience
- f) Protection of human dignity.

Major Activities Of Amnesty International In India

Amnesty International is one of the most important non-governmental organisation dedicated to the furthering of human rights in India. Amnesty International India investigates and discloses the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. Human rights change starts with the facts. The experts of Amnesty in India conduct accurate, cross-checked research into human rights violations by governments and others. Amnesty lobby governments, companies and decision makers and makes sure that they keep their promises and respect international law. Amnesty also mobilizes millions by sharing the powerful stories of the people worked with the Amnesty to campaign for change and to stand in defense of activities on the frontline. It supports people to claim their rights through education and training.

Major activities of Amnesty International includes monitoring local media, publishing the concerns of Amnesty in documents, leaflets, posters, advertisements, newsletters and websites. The mobilization methods of Amnesty includes public demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, lobbying decision makers, petitions and human rights education.

Amnesty International publishes it's reports in every year based on the detailed research done by the experts of Amnesty. This report includes five regional overviews and country by country survey. The research team of Amnesty focuses on particular countries and themes and investigates reports of human rights abuses, collaborating information from a wide range of sources and contacts. They monitor newspapers, websites and other media outlets. Amnesty sends fact finding missions to assess matters on the spot. It also receives information from many sources including from prisoners, human rights defenders and others who suffer human rights abuses, lawyers and journalists, refugees, religious bodies and community workers, diplomats, and humanitarian agencies. Researches of Amnesty International is globally recognized for it's credibility.

Major Campaigns and protests of Amnesty International in India

Major campaigns and protests done by the Amnesty International India from 2010 to 2015 are: Amnesty International India launched a scathing attack on Vedanta, accusing the London based Indian miner of disregarding human rights and failing to protect the environment in 2010. The Amnesty report says that the Orissa- Aluminum refinery had "polluted local rivers, damaged crops and disrupted the lives of Kondh tribe". Madras High court temporally ordered Vedanta to shut down a copper smelter that supplies about half of India's total output, liting environmental concerns.

Delegates of Amnesty International India visits Jammu and Kashmir to meet leaders include government officials, separatist leaders and prominent individual in media and discuss repealing the Public Safety Act (PSA) on October 2012. Reactions from local media and some officials to the presence of Amnesty was favorable. In December 2012, Amnesty International published time line of all key human rights events worldwide.

In 2013, over 16,000 people supported the campaign led by Amnesty International India for the immediate and unconditional release of human rights activist and prisoner of conscience, Irom Chanu Sharmila. In 2014, Amnesty International India has asked the Assam government to release the Kokrajhar based journalist, Jacklong Brahma on charges of having links with an armed insurgent group from administration detention and guarantee him a fair trial meeting international standards.

Amnesty International India's Ready to Report campaign in 2014 highlights the multiple challenges faced by the survivors in relation to reporting. The main aim of the campaign is to reduce the barriers to safe and dignified reporting of sexual violence, without facing prejudice. The reporting can be done through online, on-ground and mobile methods. Online method allows the user to understand exactly how the process of registering a complaint of sexual violence works, the rights anyone filing such a report is entitled to, and also provides simple tips to on what to expect when going to police station. On-ground method tries to create partnership with schools and colleges to increase awareness on being ready to report. It empower the survivors to talk about the challenges they face while reporting sexual violence and it engages with the police and other government authorities to ensure a better reporting environment for all women. Through mobile method, information, petitions, polls and more a space where the ready to report dialogue is constantly updated and it provides an easy access to information for anyone looking to get involved with the campaign, along with periodic follow-ups.

In 2015, Amnesty International India protested against the government restrictions imposed on Green Peace India's bank accounts and sources of funding on grounds of public interest violate constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association. G .Anandhapadmanabhan, executive director of Amnesty International India, said that "it is clear that Green Peace is being targeted because its strong views and campaign question the governments development policies". In March 2015, Amnesty International India appealed to government of Kerala to release two human rights activists arrested for possessing 'pro- Maoists' materials in their homes . Thousands in India supported this campaign of Amnesty International seeking their release. Amnesty International India welcomes the Supreme Court's decision to strike down Section 66A of the information Technology Act.

According to Amnesty International India report titled "Denied: failures in accountability for human rights violations by security force personnel in Jammu and Kashmir" by London based rights group is based on the examination of nearly 100 cases of alleged human rights abuses by security forces and interviews with the family members of the victims in 2013, released on July 2015, India has neglected international obligations and it's own constitution by ignoring human rights violations allegedly carried out in the name of national security in Jammu and Kashmir state.

In 2015, Sanamdeep sing wazir, campaigner of Amnesty International India conducts a case study for an Amnesty International India campaign seeking justice for the 1984 Sikh Massacre. Amnesty International India researcher, Nusrat Khan, participated in a conference and interactions with local Amnesty Groups on a invitation from the India core group of Amnesty International Germany. The interaction and conferences were co-organised by the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) with Asha Kotwal, General Secretary, All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch and Mnuela Ott from IDSN. The focus of this conference is to talk about women rights issues in India and work of

different organisations in the area. Nusrat Khan shared Amnesty International India's work in the area so far. More than 70,000 people across India supported the campaign for the abolition of death penalty.

CONCLUSION

Amnesty International is an organisation that is committed to protection and safeguard of human rights; a challenger to human rights abuses and a path setter for India to strive for the implementation of human rights instruments with safety measures so as to help the humans to enjoy their rights without any threat and discrimination. Amnesty International India established contacts with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), enjoy high reputation in India. With the existing condition of human rights violations in India, the Amnesty International became a voice to the victims of violations to an extent. Because of this, people say that pressure of Amnesty has had an effect on their own lives and at key times governments are persuaded to change their laws and practices. The international solidarity of Amnesty helps keep hope alive locally. Through detailed research and determined campaigning, Amnesty fight against abuses of human rights in India. Human rights activists are depending on its reports, publications and data in their work. Amnesty International India brings torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, free jailed for voicing their opinion and promotes human rights education in India from 2010 to 2015.

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