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Child Rights Parliament?

In my childhood I never went to school regularly. Some elders used to send me to buy beedis and cigarettes,” this was what the chief minister of the state, Siddaramaiah, shared with children while addressing them during the children's parliament. Psychology tells us that if you spend time with children, you are reminded of childhood memories– good or bitter. The children interacted with the chief minister and shared their problems with him, the CM assured that the issues would be resolved and some of it is even being implemented.

India has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has declared that it will safeguard the life and rights of children (1992). Section 12 of the Convention says that children's opinions have to be taken into consideration. Section 13 says that the government has to create platforms for children to express their opinions.

Our state government has created three programmes to ensure children's right to participation. First, in a 2003 circular, it has made it mandatory for all schools to have child rights clubs. Also, there are 'Meena Clubs' functioning in schools for girl child education. Second, as per a 2006 circular, every November Children's Grama Sabha has to be conducted in every Grama Panchayat. Three, from 2011, every year on November 13, ahead of Children's Day, Children's Parliament is being held where they present their problems before the chief minister.

However, what is important to note here is that Children's right to participation does not end with children sharing their problems. When adults take decisions about children, they have to involve children and take their opinions into account. Now, does the chief minister or the government consider the problems shared by children seriously? This has no answer.

Further, the conventions on the rights of children states that any decision taken by the government has to be in the best interest of the child. Not just that, when the government initiates any programme, it has to take into view children's opinion and their recommendations.

Since children are not voters, our politicians do not think about children and do not discuss issues with children. “What will children know?” is the general attitude. When children put forth their questions in Children's Parliament, it challenged this outlook of the politicians. In 2012, when D V Sadananda Gowda was the chief minister, answering a question in the

Children's parliament with regard to education of HIV affected children, he said, "We will run separate schools for them". The children created a history of sorts when they taught the chief minister a lesson about inclusive education.

Before taking part in the Children's Parliament in Vidhana Soudha and interacting with the Chief Minister, the children first take part at district-level Children's Parliament. Those selected from here, will come to Bengaluru and take part in a two day workshop. Children themselves will come up with questions to be posed to the CM. The elders will only assist them. Child labour, child marriage, migration, education, child trafficking apart, larger issues such as the budget set aside for children by the government, data and statistics pertaining to children are brought into debate. Not only will their communication skills enhance, but one can also see their leadership skills sharpen.

We have observed several aspects in the four years that we have actively taken part in Children's Parliament. Some MLAs are taking active interest in talking about child rights and even the questions pertaining to children and child rights have increased significantly in both the Assembly and Council sessions. Finally, some leaders have also begun to say and acknowledge that today's children are citizens of the present. The atmosphere in Vidhana Soudha is slowly becoming child friendly.

More About Author

BIO BLURB



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Nagasimha G Rao is working as Director, CRT –Child Rights Trust, Bangalore with a focus to take the essence of Child Rights to every sector since 2002. He is also Karnataka Child Rights Observatory Campaign Coordinator, CACL-K, Convener, Bangalore District and RTE Taskforce State Convenor.

As a campaign coordinator Simha has trained more than fifteen thousand people across Karnataka and other states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, New Delhi, Mumbai etc. The target group includes all the sectors right from micro to macro level which consists of children, teachers, Self Help group members, Anganawadi workers, Asha volunteers, students of various universities, counselors, front line workers of NGO, disabled youths, journalism students, reporters and government officials (DWCD, Labour, Education Departments and so on. Nagasimha G Rao has authored and edited compendium of street Plays to eradicate child labour and promote primary education, he has also developed three troop of theatre to give the awareness regarding child rights in the community through skits, street theaters etc.. Through campaigns he is influencing the political parties to consider children's issues in their party manifestos and implement the same.

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