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Human Rights Literature: A literature for the Rights of Human Beings.

Abstract:

Human Rights are for the human beings. Literature is the mirror of society which includes the traditions, customs, emotions, feelings, belief of the human beings. This paper has been an attempt to link a relationship between human rights and literature. So, both literature and human rights are interwoven with each other. This paper highlights how the readers are acquainted with their human rights through literature. It is also an attempt to give ample focus on the impact of the novels on the human beings to achieve the human rights.

Key Words: Human Rights, Human Rights Literature

Introduction:

This paper is an attempt to explore the cultural aspects of human rights from literary points. This paper demonstrates the relationship between literature and human rights. Literature reflects the society and human rights are made for the society. So, both literature and human rights are interwoven with each other. It also explicates the nature of Human Rights Literature. This paper highlights how the readers are acquainted with their human rights through Human Rights literature.

Human rights:

Human rights are the basic rights a person has simply because he or she is a human being. Human rights are for everyone, everywhere, regardless of nationality, sexuality, gender, race, religion or age. In short all persons have human rights equally, universally and forever. The foundation of modern human rights is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The 30 articles of the Declaration were adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, and over time these have been integrated into national laws and international treaties. Kant said that human beings have an intrinsic value absent in inanimate objects. To violate a human right would therefore be a failure to recognize the worth of human life. Human right is a concept which has been constantly evolving throughout human history. They have been intricately tied to the laws, customs and religions throughout the ages. The Hindu Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran (Koran), and the Analects of Confucius are five of the oldest written sources which address questions of people's duties, rights, and responsibilities. It is essential to have the knowledge of these duties, rights and responsibilities for the human beings to live the life peacefully and gracefully.

Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Ignorance limits the human mind to face the reality. It leaves us in the darkness without developing the ability to wish to see reality better. It paralyses our senses. It is quite possible that people are not aware about their rights and duties, but it is the duty of people to be aware about their duties and rights.

Literature:

Morpurgo has said that it is not simply literacy that we learn to understand and empathize but it is through literature we learn to understand and feel others' feelings. By reading literature, we learn about the lives of others, other places and cultures, different perception to see the world. We learn that we are not alone in our feelings and these feelings are universal. Literature awakens readers to new worlds and challenging situations and stimulates discussions. Marina Nemat explains: "Literature allows the victim to become a survivor and stand up to the past to ensure a better future. It is literature that carries the human experience, reaches our hearts, and makes us feel the pain of those who have been treated unjustly. Without literature and narrative, we would lose our identity as human beings and will

dissolve in the darkness of time and our repeated mistakes that lead us from one preventable devastation to the next”.¹

Sartre has argued that the reader of the novel submits to the book before him, abandoning his worldly existence to assume a vicarious one while he reads. He lives the problem which he himself helps to create, placing himself in the most sympathetic position white relation to what the writer wishes to say.

Human Rights and Literature:

“Human rights literature” is based on the idea of "engaged literature" that was first conceived by Jean-Paul Sartre in his book ‘What is literature?’.

Human rights Literature manifests the belief in the enormous power of literature to drive change, and in the author’s moral duty to their readers, both social and artistic. According to Will, literature is the ripest offspring of language. Literature according to Sartre is a tool which provides a dual action: first as a mirror to the oppressor, and second, as a guide and inspiration to the oppressed. Through literature, oppressed minorities could gain recognition and an action taken by the elite. The conceptual basis of human rights literature was first introduced in 2010 in ‘*The Tremendous Power of Literature*’, the foreword to the book ‘Freedom’, an anthology of short stories by renowned writers from around the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights Literature promotes values of human rights directly or indirectly. It aims to transform the impact of the reading experience into a motivation for social action; the latter underpins the struggle for protection of human rights. Human Rights Literature sets human rights at the core of its moral and social duty. It emphasizes the responsibility of the author to delve into writing that is not deliberately cut off from the world, geopolitical changes or social crises. Human Rights Literature not only emphasizes solely an artistic aesthetic exercise, and calls on writers to realize the social commitment under the power of their literary creation that its effect on the public is enormous. Another element of Human Rights Literature is that it explicates unique and close links between literature and human rights campaigns. Nevertheless, Human rights Literature is not a tool of propaganda, it does not expect that the author actually will call for a specific action, rather it sees the authors’ ‘role’ end as soon as s/he complete the

¹ <http://novelrights.com/2012/09/06/marina-nemat-authors-note-leila/>

process of the literary creation. The question whether his creation will inspire for social change or motivate readers to take action will be answered by the readers. Human rights literature gives the readers direct opportunities for a real action; however it will never obligate them to be committed to it.

Vered Cohen Barzilay has discussed in her essay “The Tremendous Power of Literature” about the power of literature. She has said that Literature can be as powerful as life itself. She said that literature can inspire us to change our world and give us the comfort, hope, passion and strength that we need in order to fight to create a better future for us, as well as all humanity. According to her, we just need to keep on reading and to allow the tremendous power of literature to enter our hearts and lead us to our own path. Thus Human Rights Literature does not impose on the authors actual call for action, but only the readers’ response can answer whether the literary work inspires them for social change or motivates for action.

Human Rights Reflected In Novels and Play:

Nelle Harper Lee’s ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ is one example of a novel that had major contribution and impact about the issue of Race and Rights on American public opinion. Another example is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ which was the best-selling novel of the 19th century. The novel had a deep impact on public opinion in the USA on the issue of slavery. This novel is seen as one of the triggers to the Abolitionist movement in the 1850s. ‘Justice’ by Galsworthy is a play in which the playwright has given the opportunity to the readers to think about the legal system as well as the rights of the criminals who have already underwent the punishments given by the court. As an aftereffect of this play, the psychological aspects of culprit are taken in consideration in the court. Many other novels and plays had great impact on Human Rights issues and struggles, for example: ‘Beloved’ by Toni Morrison, ‘The Trial’ by Franz Kafka and ‘Night’ by Elie Wiesel, ‘The Apple Cart’ by G.B. Shaw, etc.

Human Rights Reflected In Indian Novels:

In ‘Lowland’, we are introduced with the character named Gauri who becomes widow at a very young age. Though she was carrying a baby of her husband in her womb, her in-laws are not ready to keep her in their home. They discriminate her from all married women as a

widow. Her Parents-in-law have refused to talk to her or acknowledge her presence in the house. They don't want her, they only want her child. She was not allowed to take proper food and clothes. So here the narrator has described that the women were not given their rights to live after being widow. Gauri's in-laws were not happy with her as Subhash had married Gauri without their consent. After Subhash's death, Gauri.....Under Article 3 of UDHR, Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Even under Article 21 of Indian Constitution, Protection of life and personal Liberty is fundamental right. The right to live as a human being is not ensured by meeting only the animal needs of man. Right to live implies the right to food, water, decent environment, education, medical care and shelter. The right to shelter does not mean a mere right to have a roof for a person but right to the entire infrastructure necessary to enable them to live and develop as a human being. Jhumpa Laheri has narrated the condition of the widows who were not given their fundamental rights. She has tried to show the readers the conservative conventions of the society and insisted to improve these bad traditions of the society. Even when Subhash endeavored to convince Gauri to marry him, his mother denied. She considers her as a bad omen. Here we can see how the women were deprived from their fundamental rights. As a gender and an integral part of Humanity, Gauri as a woman has suffered much and without any fault of her own. At the end, we have seen that Subhash supported her and allow her to enjoy her human rights.

Shobha Day in her fifth novel 'Sultry Days', describes how a woman withstands against the male domination suppressing her individual urges with the help of Mrs. Verna who is the protagonist of the novel. Wives are always loyal to husbands in Indian culture but most of the husbands are disloyal to them leading their own romantic life. The husbands demand loyalty from their wives ridiculously even though they are involved in illegitimate relationships. Mr. Varma exhibits no loyalty to his wife having extramarital relationship with another woman at his office. It makes Mrs. Verma realize her innate strength in establishing her own identity. Mrs. Verma gathers up all her courage preparing to face life boldly and decides to take up a job. When Mr. Verma furiously reacts to this idea, Mrs. Verma is blunt enough to oppose him.

Suggestion:

Thus in this novel we have seen that literature gives us the real picture of society that how and in which situation the human rights are violated. At the same time, it also suggests or

gives indirect clues to enjoy the human rights. I think literature aware the people that they have the fundamental rights- right to life, right to shelter, right to have pure water, right to liberty, right to healthy environment, right to equality etc. in indirect way, but it can give a direct clue to people that according to law, people deserve fundamental rights and can demand for it.

Conclusion:

However, the novel and plays are not the only narrative genre closely associated with human rights. Various literary genres have also been the source of a rich conjuncture of literature and human rights. The nineteenth century campaign for women empowerment showcases the potential for narrative genres, especially personal narratives to mobilize public opinion.

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