



## REPRESENTATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

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Communicated :20.02.2022

Revision : 15.03.2022  
Accepted :25.03.2022

Published: 30.03.2022

### ABSTRACT:

Literary works can be seen as a potent instrument to correlate the concept of human rights as both literature and human rights always go hand in hand for the betterment of society. No one can deny the role of literature to drive change and create awareness among people of their rights and responsibilities. It serves as a beacon light to guide people the right direction. The present research paper aims at exploring the representation of human rights embedded in Indian fiction in English. All literary creation deals with the issues concerning human rights and thus, directly or indirectly promotes values and ethics of human rights. Indian fiction in English plays an important role in representing the cultural background of the country. Many novelist of Indian writing in English depicts the live picture of the society in which people live in at various modes of life. They are keenly aware of the fundamental incongruities existed in Indian society.

**Key words:** -*Human rights, Indian fiction in English, violation, social reality, religious and social discrimination etc.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Literature is a powerful medium through which writers around the world strive to make change in their society. In fact, literature is a reflection of the society. It mirrors the ills of the society with a view to making the people to realize their mistakes and to projects the virtues to amends them. It is through literature that we can understand the suffering of others and suggests solution for them. Thus, literature can be an engine for transformation in society, as it highlights the vibrant issues like oppression, discrimination, injustice and violation of human rights. Literary works can be seen as a potent instrument to correlate the concept of human rights as both literature and human rights always go hand in hand for the betterment of society. No one can deny the role of literature to drive change and create awareness among people of their rights and responsibilities. The present research paper aims at exploring the representation of human rights embedded in Indian fiction in English. All literary creation deals with the issues concerning human rights

and thus, directly or indirectly promotes values and ethics of human rights. Indian fiction in English plays an important role in representing the cultural background of the country. Many novelist of Indian writing in English depicts the live picture of the society in which people live in at various modes of life. They are keenly aware of the fundamental incongruities existed in Indian society. The novels of R. K. Narayan expose the social reality and deprivation of common men who are denied equal rights. Mulik Raj Anand novels offers a huge improvement in human rights. His novels deal with the theme of intolerance, racial and religious discrimination. He believes that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”(UDHAR: article 1) ManoharMalgoankar depicts the wretched condition of the laborers of tea-plantation of Assam. Kamala Markandaya has successfully represented human relationship in her novels. “As an artist she sincerely believe in the

universal sisterhood/ brotherhood of man and that her writing systematically espouses the cultivation of warm, caring Human relationships cannot be denied.” (Krishanwamy.) The novels of Anita Desai presents various social issues by showing her characters who are “misfits as social beings.” (Anand) Khushwant Singh is another popular novelist of Indian fiction in English who portrays actual picture communal violence during partition of India. While Salman Rushdie exposes the socio-economic position of Bihari Muslim living in Pakistan after partition of India. Thus, the issue of human rights is strongly advocated by Indian fiction in English. Human rights are also called as ‘fundamental rights’, ‘basic rights’, ‘inherent rights’, ‘natural rights and birth rights.’ They are inherent in all the individuals irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, nationality and religion. They are ought to be protected and made available to all individuals. Thus, “human rights as those of minimum rights which every individual must have against the state or other public authority by virtue of his being a member of human family irrespective of any other consideration.” (Basu.D.D.) Literature and human rights are complementary to each other. Literature has an ability to touch the hearts and minds of readers to “cultivate a better understanding of Human Rights through critical evaluation of characters, analysis of scenarios, and examination of diverse historical voices.” (Cockrill J. Hall S & Long R.) All literary genres deal with the issue of human rights, fiction is perhaps the most popular medium to represent social and political reality and the most useful in advocating human rights. Rockwell remarks that, “the patterned connection between society and fiction is so discernible and so reliable that literature ought to be added to the regular tools of social investigation.” (Rockwell) Indian novelists in English has explored all the aspects of human

rights, as they cannot escape from the political, social and intellectual realities of their society.

The novels of R. K. Narayan typically portray the peculiarities of human relationship, especially the suffering of women characters and shows the readers how important are their roles both in family and in social life. He shows the social context and everyday life of his characters by focusing on their rights and responsibilities. In ‘The Dark Room’, Narayan portrays two major female characters, Savirti and Shanta Bai. Both Saviri and Shanta Bai are stereo-typical characters opposite to each other and who are denied their equal rights. Savitri is depicted as the traditional housewife, while Shanta Bai is the modern woman in search of emancipation. But are equally vulnerable when we compare their roles in the patriarchy. Both are the victim of patriarchy and rigid social structure. Lakshmi Holmstrom opines; “In Narayan’s own formulation, a middle class woman from an orthodox society is a victim of her circumstances: either, she must live within society by accepting its norms, or she must leave it altogether, in which case, she can be supported only by her own resources. Shanta Bai and Savitri in fact are seen to balance each other, each losing out in one or another; both are victim.” (Lakshmi)

Mulk Raj Anand is a socially committed novelist continues to enjoy the reputation of being a prolific writer in the field of Indian writing in English. All his novels deal with the picture of oppressed and suppressed classes of society, which is nothing but the violation of their rights. He presents the violation of the human rights of the under privileged section of society during the pre-independence period. He viewed that literature should be an interpretation and lively depiction of people’s lives and he wrote what he experienced or witnessed in the society. For he “believe that literature must serve society, solve their problems and guide them.” (Behra) His first work of fiction which set his reputation as a

realist is 'Untouchable' (1935) that deals with social, economic, political, religious and sexual exploitation of a group of people who are forcibly ostracized from society. Anand wants to uplift and awaken the exploited, suppressed classes of the society. In *Untouchable*, human rights appeared to be restricted only to upper classes who control the society. Moreover, human rights are denied to the downtrodden section of society because of social and religious structure in India during that time. The upper class Hindus are given the authority to degrade the lower class. For example, the lower classes are deprived from their simplest and basic right which is water. They "were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of upper castes would consider the water polluted." Human rights in this novel are in conflict as they undergo British colonial system. Anand offers a huge improvement in human rights throughout the novel. He also focuses on the right of education through Bhakha's impulse to learn and write by paying a boy an anna per lesson. Anand concludes this novel with the words of young poet Iqbal Sarshar, "we must destroy caste; we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone."

Anand portrayed the suffering of the socially excluded lives of a sweeper, coolie, a peasant in an utmost realistic manner. He wishes to create a society in which men and women are free and equal rights. His second novel 'Coolie' (1936) shows his compassion for lost childhood through the character of an orphan boy Manoo. The central theme of this novel is the exploitation of the poor and the under privileged by inhuman and cruel forces of capitalism and industrialization. Manoo, an orphan boy is forced to become a domestic servant, a coolie, a factory worker and a rickshaw puller in search of livelihood. He is subjected to dehumanization

and harassment which is against humanity and is also the violation of human rights. Hence, the novel is a dramatization of the tragic denial of Manoo's human rights. Anand was conscious of the critical situation of the Indian worker and he touches the issue of human rights. His novel 'Two Leaves and a Bud' explores the ill treatment of working class life in India under British rule. The protagonist of the novel, Gangu is a worker in a British owned tea plantation. The tea estate has no proper sanitation and water supply. Gangu and his fellow workers are under the threat of dreadful disease. Gangu's wife Sajani dies of malaria. The owner of the tea estate has no concern for the welfare of their workers. They are over worked, exploited, starved and treated as sub human beings with no rights. Anand has represented all these issues regarding the human rights of industrial workers.

Manohar Malgoankar is another prominent Indian novelist writing in English. His novel 'Combat for Shadow' depicts the life of upper class and exposes a pathetic picture of the laborers of tea plantations of Assam. The novel throws light on the social prejudice and hatred between the Britishers and the Indian and thus, highlights the issue of social justice and human rights. 'The Princes' (1943) portrays the uneasy life and broken bonds of the people of an Indian state- Begwad, and the painful and problematic stories of the royal family and their struggle for survival. In 'A Bend of Ganges' (1964) Malgoankar records Indian national struggle before freedom and its aftermath like – Civil Disobedience Movement. Moreover, the novel depicts the Bombay Dock Explosion, partition of India-Pakistan and the dreadful consequences of communal riots. Malgoankar feels sympathy for the innocent people who die in the violence and thus, explores the issue of social rights.

Kamala Markandaya's 'A Handful of Rice' (1966) is a representative novel that portrays the picture of Indian society, both rural and urban.

The novel is a tragic portrayal of an impractical youth, Ravi who becomes the sufferer of industrial changes. The novel deals with urban economics with its poverty, hunger and exploitation in the ruthless society. Markanday's 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) deals with the suffering of rural people with poverty, hunger, starvation, degradation and social injustice. Rochelle Almeida remarks that the novel, Nectar in a Sieve exposed the wretched condition of typical Indian people who "suffer silently a victim of the vagaries of nature, of the feudal system of zamindari, of forces of technological progress which dislodge him from his native soil and force him to relocate an alien environment." (Rochelle)

Anita Desai is one of the popular novelists who tried to change the clichéd dogmas of the contemporary Indian society by exploring the social structure through the delineation of her characters. Her novel 'Cry, the Peacock'(1963) deals with the theme of maladjustment and the resultant estrangement in the of a neglected wife. The novel is a truthful representation of psychosomatic evolution of a women characters fighting and crying for social and emotional recognition. In this novel, Anita Desai probes deep into the problems of women. "She focuses on gender roles, seen through the lenses of female activities, goals, values, institutions, relationships and modes of communication. Her protagonists are in constant conflict with the society. They suffer in a world dominated by men, who in the guise of a father, brother, or husband resent a constant threat to their integrity." (Jyoti) In her novel 'Village By The Sea'(1982) Desai explores the theme of survival and endurance of a society living in the village. The novel depicts the real picture of Indian people who were deprived of basic and fundamental rights i.e. education, cloth, food etc.

The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya deals with social and political issues that prevailed after

the Indian Independence. His novels are an expression of the brutality of British government as well as the inability of the Indians who failed to live in unity. He strives to express the social evils confronting society and the conceivable remedies through his novels. In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi Bhattacharya says: "I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue do not appear to me a sound judgement." (Bhattacharya) He gave importance to the ancient values and heritage by promoting a vision for the formation of a better Indian society free from the evils of exploitation, suffering, and hunger. He explores the theme of freedom and social reform in his novels 'So Many Hunger' (1947) and 'A Goddess Named Gold.'(1960) Bhabani Bhattacharya is one of the best spokespersons of the Indian rural people who have given rise to the new genre of the Indian English fiction "the Hunger Theme." Thus, Bhattacharya is a committed writer who uses novel as a weapon to propagate human rights by probing deep into the various facts of Indian society.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent was an event of great magnitude that had a very profound effect on writers. Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan'(1956) is an outcome of the same influence. The novel is a brilliant and realistic picture of political hatred, violence, and of mass passion during those fateful and turbulent days. The novel present pre and post – partition situation in Mano Majra, a small village situated near the border in Punjab. Singh has beautifully portrayed the real picture of the diverse effect of partition of India and the suffering that people were made to experience.

The intersection between human rights and various forms of literary creations of Indian fiction in English explicitly attempt to participate in human rights issues. Arundhati

Roy's 'The God of Small Things' (1997) can be read as a novel championing for the realization and implementation of the concept of human rights. The novel explores the issues like equality and dignity for all classes, economic rights of women, equal wages rights for the Dalit, children's rights, and right to life and freedom. The above discussion makes it clear that the novelist of Indian writing in English are thus, aware of social change. They never fail to react against the denial and deprivation of human rights. Their "literary works and literary modes of thinking have played important parts in the emergence of modern human rights ideals and sentiments, as well as in the elaboration of national and international human rights laws." (Slaughter)

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