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Indian Fiction in English and Human Rights

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Abstract: Human rights are one of the factors that ensure the hopes of the common man. Sadly, however, it is not uncommon to see these rights violated by dictatorial regimes. When this happens, literature must take the initiative to bring light to such violations and help people sympathize with those whose rights are abused. This article explores the relationship between literature and human rights. It argues that literature can play a paramount role in promoting human rights in two ways. First, literature, being a reflection of reality, can expose the various human rights violations and abuses happening across the world and this will help people to be more aware of these violations. Secondly, using its unique power to touch the hearts and minds of people, literature can make people more sympathetic towards those who suffer and live in pain as a result of violations of their human rights. Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament.Anita Desai shows the denial of social justice to women. Khuswant Singh and Salman Rushdie draw attention towards sexual abuse of children.
Keywords: literature, human rights, labour.Indian writers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human rights are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being (Sepulveda et al., 2004). However, these basic rights have somehow been taken, or are being taken away from a vast section of the population across the globe. Although almost all nations ratified and signed the UNDHR (Universal Declarations of Human Rights) and other human rights instruments that aim to end the violations of human rights, activities and practices that violate human rights such as freedom of speech, racism, oppression, exploitation, poverty, subjugation of women, forceful exploitation of children's labour, ethnic cleansing, forced population transfers, torture and genocide are still rampant across the globle.Literature in this process not only engages itself with human-right concepts, their vicarious possibilities, but also paves way for interdisciplinary readings of these two interrelated disciplines. These seemingly distinct subjects inform each other at the level of theory, praxis and pedagogy. Literary works can, therefore, be seen as potent and rich resources to correlate and study the concepts of Human Rights as both literature and Human Rights become complementary to each other. This paper would understand Indian Fiction in English through Human Rights perspectives which involve a critical dissection of the chosen literary texts that highlight and problematize certain

II. WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Scholars have defined human rights in more or less a similar fashion as rights which are inherent to the mere fact of being human. According to Sepulveda, et al. (2004) human rights represent basic values common to all cultures, and must be respected by all countries worldwide. Similarly, Rae (2009) described human rights as any rights that can be shown to follow from a set of human values existing independently of the laws and customs of particular states or societies. The concept of human rights is based on the belief that every human being is entitled to enjoy her/his rights without discrimination. Human rights are distinguished from other rights in two ways (Sepulveda, et al., 2004). Firstly, they are characterized by being inherent in all human beings by virtue of their humanity alone; inalienable (within qualified legal boundaries), and equally applicable to all. Secondly, the main duties deriving from human rights fall on states and their authorities or agents, not on individuals. The most important implication of these characteristics, according to these scholars, is that human rights must themselves be protected by "the rule of law" (Sepulveda, et al., 2004, p. 6).

Literature has substantially contributed to the protection of human rights. The goal of literatures relating to human rights is to combine the literary driving force with the motivation for action, what is a fundamental and integral element of the struggle for protection of human right. The literature which deals with the human right issues thus directly or indirectly, promote values of human rights. The literary creations in Indian Writing in English are the mirror of society. The novelists of Indian writing in English are keenly aware of the fundamental incongruities which life and world are confronting us in day to day life. They accept the reality as it is presented before them. They see the society and its development with an ironic detachment and accept reality ungrudgingly.

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R.K. Narayan, prefer to sit at the fence and see no point in attempting to citizen or correct things. R.K. Narayan, therefore says in Mr. Sampath [1949], that it is "futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set thing right anywhere". (P. 63). R.K. Narayan's central characters show everything that occurs in the every walk of society. R.S. Singh rightly says; "Narayan's heroes are aware of social and political changes, but they do not take sides, nor do they commit of responsibility to the extent it helps him to bring out their human qualities. His vision is comic and his central concern is vivid presentation of the ironies of life." R. K. Narayan's 'The Dark Room' (1938) demonstrates the typical Indian attitude to family life and expose the deprivation and predicament of common house wives, who are denied equal rights in their day to day life. The right of equality as enshrined under Article 14 of Constitution of India is virtually meaningless for them. The heroine, Savitri, typifies all suffering house wives of our society who are exploited by all means in their life. 'The English teacher' (1945), says Graham Greene, satirizes the fault in existing education system which "makes us (nothing but) morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administrative offices". [9] The novels of R.K. Narayan, therefore, are more a sociological document than a literary piece of work. Mulk Raj Anand is keenly aware of society and he choose a central character through whose view point he stares at the various absurdities, eccentricities and other ills of society where basic human rights are denied to anybody. Anand, therefore, is great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament

One of the female writers, Anita Desai is attentive in exploring the social structure through the individual character of her novels. 'Cry, the Peacock' (1963) highlights the problem of 'misfit marriages'. Maya is a young girl in her full youth and emotions but she is compelled by the circumstances to marry an old man. The right of life and liberty enshrined under Article 21 of Constitution is virtually meaningless for her. 'The village by the Sea' (1982) highlights the real existence of the poverty stricken people of India. Khushwant Singh also deals with various human problems. His first novel, 'Train to Pakistan' (1956), is one of the finest novels of IndoAnglian fiction. It present real pictures of communal violence erupted during partition of India. In the novel, 'The Company of women' (1999), he highlights the sexual abuse of children. Molly in the novel explains as to how she was sexually exploited by her near relative and says; "it was my own uncle, my mother's younger brother, a good twenty years older than me. Beast! Took advantage of poor, innocent me" (P.229). In the novel, 'The Moors Last Sigh', Rushdie highlights corruption in Churches where the sex starved young priest sometimes endeavour to exploit the innocent girls. Rushdie also reacts sharply against sexual abuse of minor children at other level. He shows as to how Uma Saraswati, an art student of M.S. University, Baroda, was sexually abused when she was a minor child by an uncle (Father's Colleague). She came from a respectable Gujrati Brahmin family, but had been orphaned at young age. Her mother, a depressive, had hanged herself when Uma was just twelve and her father, driven mad by the tragedy, had set himself on fire. Uma had been rescued from penury by a kind 'uncle', actually not an uncle, but a teaching colleague of his father," who paid for her education in return for sexual favours (so not's kindly' either)". (P. 265) Another character, Shushantika, also admits that she was sexually exploited while she was a minor and says," I was sixteen. Nothing romantic about the deflowering.My own uncle, my father's younger brother. This usual thing, you know a close relative whom you trust. It seemed harmless enough at first kissing and cuddling, that sort of thing. Then he thought he'd me worked up and started playing with my breasts and stroking my crotch." (P 267)

Sahgal and Arundhati Roy show the miseries and sufferings of women. Their miseries are beyond imagination. They are bound to live miserable life. The armless beggar, who is proof of Rose's murder, narrates how eight policemen sexually insult five women from his village. They were exploited by policemen. Velutha in the novel 'The God of Small Thing' was crushed to lump by policemen only because he loves a high caste woman. The treatment which Ammu gets in the police station is also the best example of violation of human rights.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the relationship between Indian fiction and human rights. It argues that literature can play a vital role in human rights. It can reveal the reality; expose the different human right violations and abuses happening around us. The Indian novelist used its unique power to touch the heart and minds of people. They create the atmosphere to the people in the novels to become more sympathetic towards those people who suffer and live in pain as a result of the violations of their human rights.

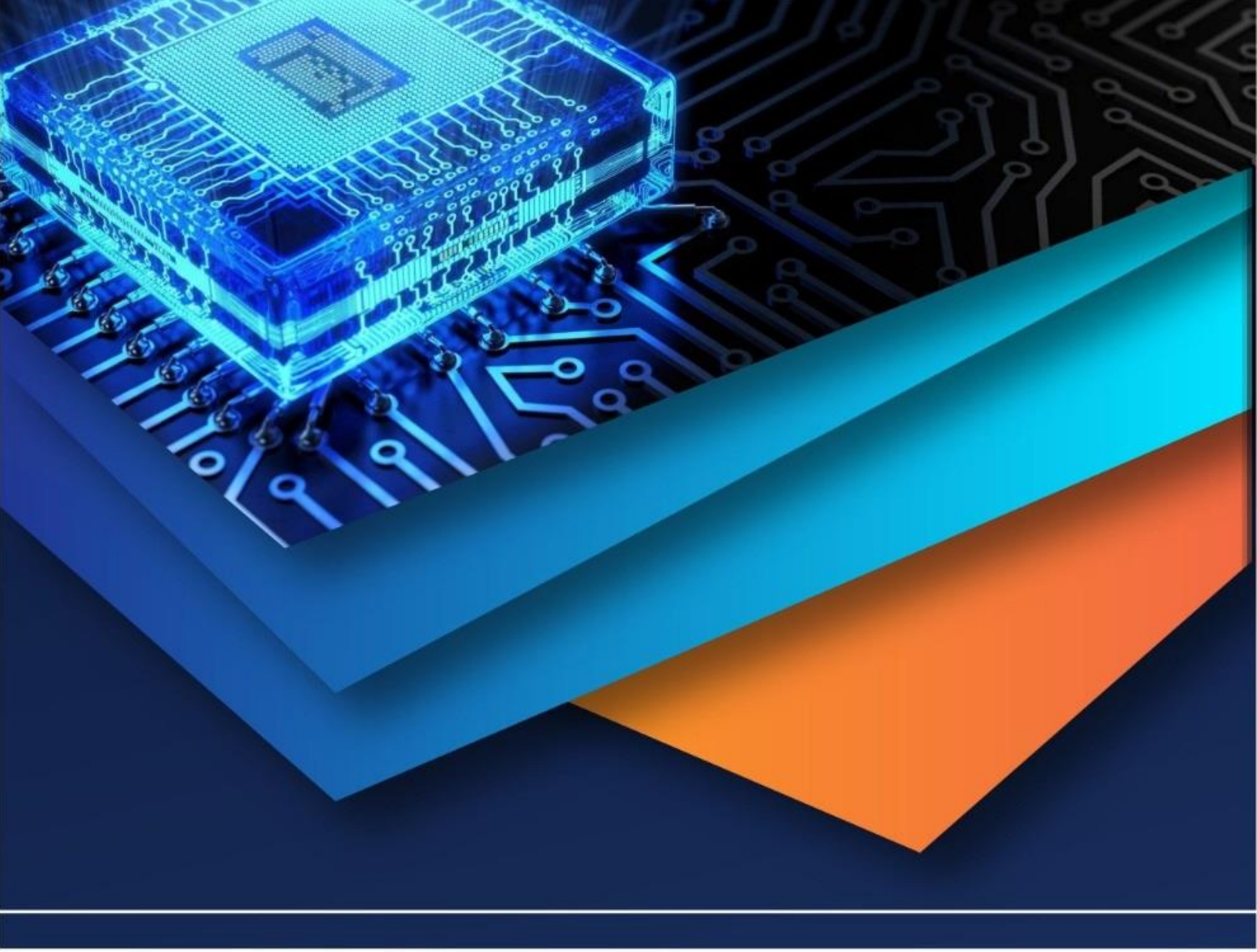
The novelists of Indian writing in English thus, are known of various activities of society. They never miss to respond against the denial and denial of human rights and civil liberties such as inequality, exploitation, discrimination, untouchablity and also rejection of human rights etc. The novels of Indian writing in English presents socio-political situation of society and some of the novelist may, therefore, be regarded as the "human rights activist behind mask" for their appearance in the course of appearance of original urge.

The meaning of gender and sexuality and the balance of power between women and men at all levels must be studied. Violence against women needs challenging the way that gender roles and power are articulated in society. In many countries women have a secondary status. Changing people's attitude and approach towards women will take a long time.

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