



Human Rights and Portrayal of Women in Indian English Fiction

Dr. Surekha

Lecturer in English, H No. 1008, Sector-4, Rohtak, Haryana, India

Received: 20 Dec 2022; Received in revised form: 13 Jan 2023; Accepted: 19 Jan 2023; Available online: 26 Jan 2023

©2022 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *Human Rights* are those rights which belong to an individual as a consequence of being a human being. It is a birth right inherent in all the individuals irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and nationality. Human Rights, essential for all round development of the personality of the individual in society and therefore, ought to be protected and be made available to all individuals. Literature has substantially contributed to the protection of human rights. 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. The literary creation such novels, short-stories etc. 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. The heroes of R.K. Narayan present the ironies of life and the heroines expose the deprivation of common housewives who are denied equal rights in their day to day life. Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament. Manohar Malgoukar presents the pathetic life of the labourers of tea-plantation of Assam. Kamla Markandeya highlights pitiable conditions of peasants of India. Anita Desai shows the denial of social justice to women. Khuswant Singh and Salman Rushdie draw attention towards sexual abuse of children. Thus, literature carries the human experience which reaches the heart of those who have been treated improperly by denial of basic human rights.

Keywords— *Human rights, literature, women, injustice, incongruity.*

Literary works can 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. The concept of Human Rights is as old as Art. Being about life, Art takes its sustenance from life and, as such, it is not only an artistic manifestation revealing a profound aesthetic construct but also a bearer of social and human significance. At one level, this artistic concern manifests itself through the exploration and postulation of Human Rights. And perhaps the art that deals and depicts life in its spectrum manifestations is literature. 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. 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 Human Rights concepts embedded in them.

The study proposes to evolve as a sociological and deconstructive reading of the literary texts chosen for the purpose. In its problematization of Human Rights issues, the study would specifically focus on some literary representation of women in Indian Fiction in English. Women the very creation of God that makes living beautiful is often at the receiving end of the trauma. In India women constituted nearly fifty percent of our population. Women are denied rights from the grave. In many parts of India the birth of girl child is not welcome. That threatens the existence of women. It is again more surprising that women are not even aware that they have

any rights in masculine world. Some are treated as slaves in their adulthood and most don't even enjoy a childhood.

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.

Some elder novelists like Mulk Raj Anand react sharply against social injustice, deprivation and discrimination existing in the society. Some others, like 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". (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." They expose the denial and deprivation of human right and probes the ills of society too, but for never sadistic pleasure or for scating disgust among readers and their chief aim is to highlight the hypocrisy of ideals, ambitions and pride but not to guide the society in any particular direction but simply to make us realize.

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. The major thematic concern of Anand's novels is the economic exploitation of weaker section of society and existing class discrimination causing serious inequality. [10] Anand's 'Untouchable' (1935) highlights the pitiable condition of down trodden people in Indian society, and existing Brahmin's, hypocrisy that live a double standard in life. 'Coolie' (1936) highlights the pains and predicaments of poor working people. 'The Road' (1961) exposes the 'establishment' because that is the first step towards the new world of freedom and equality of human dignity and happiness. His novels present minute pictures of Indian society with special focus on the plights of poor people.

Manohar Malgoankar, a retired lieutenant colonel of Indian army, has proved his abilities not only in the battle of war but also in the battle of books as a novelist. His novel, 'Combat for Shadow' (1964) presents lively pictures of pathetic life of the laborers of tea- plantations of Assam. The novel throws light on the deprivation of socio-legal rights of laborers and their exploitation in the tea plantation industry. 'The Princes' (1943) exposes the ills of princely courts degenerated into centre of intrigues and luxuries. The hero of the novel describes those people who lead reformist movement against monopoly of powers and corruption in politics existing those days. 'A Bend of Ganges' (1964) shows as to how the socio religious harmony existing between Hindu and Muslim community disintegrates and as to how both communities became enemy of each other due to communal riots. The barbarous cruelties heaped on both communities and Muslim began to think that, for them, Hindus are more dangerous than Britishers.

Kamla Markandey is also keenly aware of various social issues. Her novel, 'Handful of Rice' (1996), shows the importance of rice in the life of poor people. 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) highlights the peasant's problem existing during the colonial rule during pre-independence days. Indian farmers cultivate rice fields standing in knee-deep water and sweating in the scratching rays of the sun. For these peasants, rice is just like nectar, the valuable gift of God which gives them eternal life. They produce rice with great labor but they are unable to retain it in their houses. Just like water, which cannot be stored in a sieve, rice slips down through the fingers of peasants and disappears in the corn-bins of landlords and money lenders. 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) is also a touching tale of millions of helpless women living in rural India. The

heroine, Rukmini, represents the pitiable conditions of unprivileged and helpless women of rural India, who are unrewarded for their labor. They continue to put up with injustice, inequality and inhuman treatment throughout their life as if it is their destiny. Rukmani and her peasant family face every conceivable problem brought on them by cruel and unjust social order. The novelist not only shows the miserable life of common rural masses but wants to hit also at the unjust existing social and economic order of rural Indian society.

Anita Desai is interested in exploring the social structure through the individual protagonist 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 presents 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" (229). 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." (267)

Salman Rushdie in his novel, *Shame* (1983), highlights the socio-economic condition of Bihari Muslim, called Mohajirs, living in Pakistan after partition of India. The community is treated differently and they are struggling hard to protect their civil liberties in the country. In 'The Satanic Verses' (1988), highlights the social inequality among Hindus and as to how lower caste men are called "Scheduled Caste". They are not allowed to fetch water from the village's common well and thus condemn ironically these water-tight divisions existing in the Indian society. In the novel, 'The Moor's 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 Gujarati 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)". (265)

It is the primary duty of every country and state to provide the right of adequate food, health. These rights should be used by every citizen without considering sex, religion, caste, class or sect. Violation of human right has become very common in world. News papers, T.V. channels inform us that every day and every moment, Human Rights are being violated. In serious sense of speaking 'Human Right' means the right of life, liberty, equality and the dignity of an individual irrespective of caste, creed and sex. The protection and preservation of these human rights is a great challenge for every country. Cases of domestic violence, traditional practices, female genital mutilation, son preference, sexual harassment, prostitution and trafficking violence against women migrant workers, custodial violence against women. The human rights of women are violated from birth to death. Even female's right to born is taken away by sex determination tests; female infanticide is common in our country. In India women are treated as secondary, most of the women do not enjoy any rights at all. Because they are living according to Manu's law: at first as per wish of father, after marriage as per the wish of husband and in the old age as per the whims of sons and now a days as per whims of daughter-in-law also. It is not the duty of only Government but also the responsibility of every citizen to protect and safe guard the human rights. Types of violence against women: Violence against Women in the family occurs in every state or in every country. It has long been private matter but it becomes the tragedy of public matters.

In many countries women fall victim due to traditional practices that violate their human rights. There are many harmful customs deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of the society. Indian women are often considered as appendixes of their male relative or husbands. In the novel 'Ladies Coupe' Akhila's friend Karpagam satirizes Manu's laws. "Who made these laws anyway? Some man who could not bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other man" (25). Most of Anita Nair's characters experience the burden of tradition related to the role of women in Indian society. Son preferences affect women in

many ways. Girl children are neglected in terms of essential needs as nutrition, care and education. Many gender diction clinics are termination female fetus In Roy's 'The God of Small Things', "Ammu finished her schooling the same year that her father retired from his job in Delhi and moved to Ayemenen" (38). In opposite to this the son, Chacko is sent to Oxford, in foreign country for education. In Indian patriarchal society daughter's education is the waste of money because they are married in another family. So women is expected only the mother of healthy sons, sex object and care taker only. Ammu's parents did not arrange dowry for her and take trouble to search a husband for her. In 'Rich Like Us', Ram gets her permission to marry with two women, Mona and Rose and have love affair with Marcella, only because he is man.

In the novel 'A Married Woman' the husband Hemant shows progressive views about daughter and son, but when Astha is pregnant for second time, Hemant wishes to have a son. In financial status women are always secondary. Though they avail the opportunity of education. But it is also as per the views of parents or husband or parents in laws. Career options are reserved for sons only. If they get chance to do jobs, but they are also chosen by male family members. Still they do not have their right on their salary. The houses are in their name, only up to repay the installments of housing loans. They do not have the property rights in parent's family or parent- in-law family. In the novel "Rich Like Us", Rose is murdered by her stepson Devilkin due to her share in the property. In the society social laws are more powerful. In the society we do not get example that a daughter demanding her share in her father's property, but in her parent-in-law's home there is same condition. The legislative laws are different and the conditions on actual fields are different. Dowry is the greatest crimes against women. Dowries are still demanded even when the girl can supplement to man's income. Failure to pay dowry can lead to violence. Many cases are not reported. Early marriages for e.g. Bimmy's marriage in 'Rich Like Us' are settled without the consent or girl, is another form of human rights violation. Early marriages follow pregnancies can affect the health of women for life. Narayan Sahgal shows that sati system continues in post-independent India in the form of dowry deaths where brides are burnt for dowry. Here bride is murdered by the family members of her parents-in-laws, though her husband is alive. 'The brides not satisfy their greedy demands for more dowry' (30).

Because society gives importance to money and customs and not to the importance to the love and psychology of human being. Social legislation is in strong need to be changed. 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. "Inspector Thomas Mathews stared at Ammu's breast as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and the Kottayam police didn't take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children.(7-8) Rape is a weapon to subjugate women. The women is safe nowhere. Rape can occur anywhere. For e.g. in the novel "Ladies Coupe" Mariakalanthu is raped buy Chettiar's nephew, Murugesan. He makes her an unmarried mother. She becomes the victim of rape at the time of pongal. He catches her and raped brutally. She says "I felt him tear into me, filling me with a great anguish, and the tears began to rain. Thick viscous tears that slid into me. Pale transparent tears that squeezed themselves out from my tightly scrunched up eyes". (63)

CONCLUSION

The novelists of Indian writing in English thus, are keenly aware of various happenings of society. They never miss to react against the denial and deprivation of human rights and civil liberties such as inequality, exploitation, discrimination, untouchability and also denial 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 presentation in the course of expression of creative urge. The meaning of gender and sexuality and the balance of power between women and men at all levels must be reviewed. Violence against women requires 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 mentality towards women will take a long time. Raising awareness of the issues of violence against women and educated men to see women a human being is as important as taking legal steps to protect women's human right. The National Human right Commission cannot be blamed, when the entire society is capable in the respect of Human Rights violation. It is not NHRC to keep vigil on every human being in the country. No commission can police every corner of the country. It is we people; it is the duty of every citizen to rise the occasion. This can be brought up by only through general awakening which make everyone understand the eternal values of life and dignity

of an individual irrespective of casts, class, sex, crud and sect.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agarwal Dr. H.O., *HumanRights*, Central Law Publication, Allahabad, 2004.
- [2] Kapur Manju, *A Married Woman*, Indian Ink, New Delhi, 2005.
- [3] Kant Dr. Anjani, *Human Rights : Recent Trends of Judiciary in India*, AIR 2014 Journal.
- [4] Mohanti Jagannath, *Human Rights Education*, Deep and Deep Publication, New Delhi, 2003
- [5] Nair Anita, *Ladies Coupe*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2001.
- [6] Panigrahi S. K., *Caste in India-A Historical Perspective*, Cyber tech Publications, 2000
- [7] Roy Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*, Flamingo, London, 1997.
- [8] Sahgal Nayantara, *Rich Like Us*, Heinemann, London, 1985.
- [9] Soni Sureshkumar, *Human Rights Concept, Issues and Emerging Problems*, Legal Publication, New Delhi, 2007.
- [10] Singh R.S. *Indian Novel In English*, Arnold Heineman, New Delhi, 1947.
- [11] Singh Pramod Kumar, *The Novel of R.K. Narayan; A Critical Evolution*, Atlantic Publisher, Delhi, 1999.
- [12] Singh PK. *Supreme Court On Human Rights & Social Justice*; Allahabad Law Agency, Faridabad, 2001.
- [13] ----- *Five-Contemporary Indian Novelists*; Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2001.
- [14] ----- *The Novels of Salman Rushdie*; Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2001.
- [15] ----- *The Novels of Khushwant Singh*; Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2005.
- [16] ----- *Indian Fiction In English*; Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2001.
- [17] ----- *The Novels of R.K. Narayan*; Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1999.
- [18] Wikipedia.Org/wiki/Human_rights_ literature