

# Concept of Human Rights & Civil Rights in Indian Novel in English

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**Abstract---**“Human Rights” are those rights which belong to an individual as a consequence of being a human being. ‘Civil liberties’ are ‘the rights guaranteed to citizens or residents of a country or territory as a matter of fundamental law’. It is 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 house-wives 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 Malgoankar 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 experiences which reach the heart of those who have been treated improperly by denial of basic human rights.

**Keywords---** Civil liberty, human rights, literature

## I. INTRODUCTION

‘Human Rights’ are those rights which belong to an individual as a consequence of being a human being.[1] They are based on elementary human needs. Some of these human needs are elemental for sheer physical survival and health. Others are elemental for physical survival and health. Such human rights can be perceived and enumerated. These rights are associated with the traditional concept of natural law. ‘Human Rights’ are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because he or she is a human being.[2] According to S-2(d) of the ‘Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993’, ‘Human Rights’ means the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in the international covenants and enforceable by constitution in India.[3]

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 is a milestone in the field of human rights. The United Nations General Assembly Proclamations on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 resolved a common standard of achievement of all people and all nations. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, provides that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Human rights, being the birth right, are therefore, inherent in all the individuals irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and nationality. These rights are essential for all individuals as they are consonant with their freedom and dignity and are conducive to physical, moral, social and spiritual welfare. They are also necessary as they provide suitable conditions for the material and moral uplift of the people. In view of these immense significance to human beings, the human rights are also sometimes called as ‘fundamental rights’, ‘basic right’, ‘inherent rights’, ‘natural right’ and ‘birth rights’. ‘Civil liberties’ are the rights guaranteed to citizens as a matter of fundamental rights.

Human rights are essential for all round development of the personality of the individuals in society and, therefore, ought to be protected and be made available to all individuals.[4] D.D. Basu, therefore, defines ‘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”.[5]

## II. HUMAN RIGHTS AND ROLE OF LITERATURE

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 fundamental and integral elements 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 novelist 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 of the novelists like Mulkraj Anand reacts 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”. (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." [6] 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, ambition and pride but not to guide the society in any particular direction but simply to make us realize. [7]

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 heroines, Savitri, typifies all suffering house wives of our society who are exploited by all means in their life. [8] *'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 any body. Anand, therefore, is great humanist and his prime concern is human predicament. The major thematic concern of Anand's novels is the economics 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 who 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 labourers of tea- plantations of Assam. The novel throws light on the deprivation of socio-legal rights of laboures and their exploitation in the tea plantation industry. *'The Princes'* (1943) exposes the ills of princely courts degenerated into centres of intrigues and luxuries. The hero of the novel describe 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 labour 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 leanders. *'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 labour. They continue to put up with injustice, inequality and inhuman treatment throughout their life as if it 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 Indo-Anglion 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). 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. These 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)

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 castemen are called "Scheduled Caste". The novel depicts as to how these lower castemen are not allowed to fetch water from the village's common well and thus

condemns ironically these water-tight divisions existing in the Indian society. 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)

### III. 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.[11]

### IV. END NOTES

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