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Rights to Children in Indian English Literature

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The paper is an attempt to find the remedies on rights to children with help of Indian English literature. "Peace all over the World can be established not on gun powder but on pure justice" Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest apostle of peace the world has seen after Buddha and Christ. He is widely recognized as one of the twentieth century's greatest political and spiritual leaders. Gandhiji is known as the apostle of non-violence and peace. Gandhian concepts on Satyagraha, Education, Unity, Truth etc relate to human rights and responsibilities. Human rights are rights that a person can enjoy for being born as a human being. Rene Cassin, the principal drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has rightly defined that "the science of human rights as a particular branch of social science- the object of which is to study human relations in the light of human dignity while determining those rights and faculties which are necessary as a whole for the full development of each human being's personality." Almost all the countries of the world adhere to the principle declarations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in maintaining equality of rights, dignity, peace and brotherhood in peoples.

Key Words: Child labour, psychosomatic, Deteriorating

Introduction:

India has always played an important role in the formation of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. The Constitution of India very well reflects the key principles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights and allows sufficient free play of rights and liberties to its citizen.

A literary genre directly or indirectly focuses on human rights. The concept of human rights is as old as literature. 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. Literature has always spoken about human rights through texts written against the formerly established hierarchies, and later with post-colonial, feminist etc. writing and studies. It is said that literature is the mirror of life and the writers very tenderly catches the subjects of human agony. The poets, novelists, dramatists and essay writers became the voice of sufferer and help them to seek justice

Fiction is the key genre which creates strength among the readers and inspired him to raise voice against injustice. Fiction is perhaps the most closely related to social and political reality and the most useful in advocating human rights. As Rockwell says,

"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".

This is exactly what all fictions strive to attain, no matter what the theme or technique of a literary writing may be and this is why, I feel that fiction thus directly or indirectly, promote values of human rights and Indian English novelists were inspired and influenced by the great national heroes like M. K Gandhi, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar name and so. 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 rights of children. 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. Whatever goals the writings aim at, may it be history, anti-colonial, postcolonial, modern, post-modern, feminist etc. purposes, what comes up once and again is the story of Indian man and woman stressed or glorified against all odds and oddities. Indian literature is one of the oldest literary representations that highlight the demography and culture of the country. It is interesting to note that Indian culture has never taken the individual and society as antagonistic to each other. The novelists of Indian writing in English are keenly aware of the fundamental *awdilas 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 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 experience which reaches the heart of those who have been treated improperly by denial of basic human rights.

Rights of Children in Indian Constitution:

Indian constitution has bestowed different kinds of rights on children such as

- The Right to and Identity (Article 7 AND 8) Children are entitled to a name, legally registered with the government, and a nationality.
- Further, they must have the right to an identity, in the form of a public record. This ensures national support, as well as access to social services.
- The Right to Health (Article 23 AND 24), Medical care, nutrition, protection from harmful habits (including drugs) and safe working environments are covered under the right to health.
- The Right to Education (Article 28), Right to free primary education is critical for helping children develop discipline, this includes freedom from violence, abuse or neglect.
- The Right to a Family Life (Articles 8, 9, 10, 16, 20, 22 and 40). Children who do not have access to a family life, have a right to special care and must be looked after properly, by people who respect their ethnic group, religion, culture, and language.
- The Right to be protected from violence (Article 19 and 34). Protection from violence extends even to family members, and children must not suffer ill-treatment or sexual or physical violence.
- The Right to an opinion (Article 12 and 13). All children deserve the right to voice their opinions, free of criticism or contempt.
- The Right to be protected from exploitation (Articles 19, 32, 34, 36 and 39) As exploitation is usually achieved through violent means, protection from abuse, negligence and violence by parents, even if it is justified as an instrument of achieving discipline at home.

Children must have similar rights that of an adult only that they are meant to be more protected because of their *Verne-ability* of the age and tenderness. According to the Child Rights Convention:

The child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society... in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, and solidarity.

The poverty-stricken:

The poverty-stricken existence of the children marked by scarcity of basic needs and the abundance of malnutrition, ill-health, and lack of identity. It is not only the need for the bare necessities, but also the lack of their socio-psychological security that leads the protagonists to the abis of poverty-stricken existence. For the low class Dalit's the problem of untouchability adds to this problem giving it a very bad shape. From Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* very little has changed if the poverty-stricken state of the people is compared. Though the word poverty seems to affect the adult world, yet it is pathetic to note that poverty is unavoidable in children as they are very much a part of the poverty affected community. Children are ruthlessly denied of their rights because of their parents' inability to get them proper food, clothes, shelter, education and even the dignity of a child that is due on them for being born as human beings. If we analyse gravely, we can easily find that all problems in the novels converge to one major socio-economic problem and that is poverty. Poverty has taken away their land, freedom, has forced them to work as bonded labourers and become prostitutes; it denies them voice and gives rise to negative feelings like anguish, hatred, revenge and fear. They grow up crippled and their personalities are not exposed. Poverty, on the whole, hinders in their physical and psychological growth which in turn ruins their hopes for better future. Bakha and his friends in *Untouchable*, and Omprakash and his friends in *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* are representatives of Dalit children who not only are deprived of love, affection, right to proper education, playfulness and care but are heaped with curses, insults, and hatred from the world they live in. Their lives are burdened with the burden of caste that they have inherited from their forefathers and would have to carry on till death.

In *Untouchable*, Anand very well depicts the hardships of a boy, Bakha, from morning till evening, who becomes tired and frustrated with life because of the maltreatment he receives out of the rich, for whom he and his parents serve for a meager meal. Though Bakha has reached just eighteen yet we see in him all the qualities of a child. His utter desire to grow up like an adult 'Sahib' brings him in the category of a child. In fact, his reaching of the adult age is very much a contrast and confusion of his own self as the world demands from him more than what he can think and do. Anand purposely sketches his age as eighteen years to build in the confusion and contradiction of his outlook even more. Here, Bakha is considered as an Andalusians and is studied in the light of children's rights.

Both Valmiki and Anand bring out the picture of the locale of their protagonists and their state of living in their works. This directly highlights their living condition, proving that the foremost basic right to a proper living condition is violated because of their caste. Bakha of *Untouchable* and Om of *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* are sons of low cast sweepers; so their houses are strained away from the main stream of life. In *Untouchable* The untouchable peoples have typically not been accorded the

same rights as higher castes; and are not able to use different temples and public facilities for their comforts. People in 'Untouchable' live in mud-walled cottages huddled in a colony who are the scavengers, the leather workers, the washer men the barbers, the grass-cutters, the sweepers and other outcasts. Anand describes the condition of people in this way:

The outcast's colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows...outside their town and cantonment boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcasts from the Hindu society.

Anand's untouchable characters spend very pitiable time and only share the agonies with the readers. Their plight is very much depressing, and they have to depend on the mercy of high caste Hindus for the fulfillment of the basic needs like water and food. Bakha who oversaw cleaning public toilet, experiences physical and mental anguish on the way to town and while sweeping roads and cleaning toilets. He observes that "men came one after another, towards the latrines. Most of them were Hindus". He feels thirsty and does not get water. He feels humiliation as the cigarette-seller and sweet-seller give him cigarette and jalebi without touching him though they do not feel hitch in taking his money

In *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, Omprakash Valmiki was born into the Chuhra caste (Which is popularly known as Bhangi in Maharashtra), whose awing job it was to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose off dead animals, work the fields during harvests, and perform other physical labor for upper-caste people, including the Tyagi Brahmins. The Tyagis didn't address them by name, only called out, 'Oe Chuhre' or 'Abey Chuhre.' It was alright to touch cows and stray dogs but touching a Chuhra inflicted instant 'pollution' on the Tyagis. During his boyhood, his entire family worked hard, yet they 'didn't manage to get two decent meals a day,' not the least because they often didn't get paid for their labor and instead 'got swan at and abused.

The society and even teachers were not allowed him to get education. His father had admitted him into a primary school. When the boy finally got in, he was not allowed to sit on the benches but on the floor, away from the upper-caste boys, at the back by the door, from where he couldn't see the blackboard well. Other boys beat him casually, turning him into a cowering introverted kid. Even the teachers looked for excuses to punish him, he writes:

I picked up the three-day-old broom [now only a cluster of] thin sticks. Tears were falling from my eyes. I started to sweep the compound while my tears fell. From the doors and windows of the schoolrooms, the eyes of the teachers and the boys saw this spectacle. Each pore of my body was submerged in an abyss of anguish".

As it turned out, his father was passing by that day and saw him sweeping the grounds. Sobbing and overcome by hiccups, the boy told him the story. Father snatched the broom and with eyes blazing, began to scream, 'Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya, who forces my son to sweep?' All the teachers stepped out, including the headmaster, who called his father names and roared back, 'Take him away from here ... The Chuhra wants him educated ... Go, go ... Otherwise I will have your bones broken.' On his way out, his father declared in a loud voice, 'I am leaving now ... but this Chuhre ka will study right here ... In this school. And not just him, but there will be more coming after him.' His father's courage and fortitude left a deep and decisive mark on the boy's personality and the result we have been seeing that he is acclaimed as worldwide.

In Intermediate School once Om had to get his Scout Uniform ironed. When he had approached the laundry man he said,

'We don't wash the clothes of the Chuhra Chamars. Nor do we iron them. If we iron your clothes then the Tagas won't get their clothes washed by us. We will lose our roti.'... His reply crushed me. I came back without a word. My heart was heavy. I had lost faith in God. One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste.

It is a traumatic realization that how the system of caste has torn in the unity between people. The dhobis who are also considered as low in caste, but higher than the sweepers, also reject ironing Om's clothes not because they are lower in caste than the dhobis, but because serving the lower would deprive any business from the rich, which is the major source of income for the poor. The irony of caste domination is such interrelated and relative at every section of life that it has created a divide, handicapped the usual values of brotherhood between human beings and paralyzed the social system. It is ironic that one has to respect the caste divide to save his job and family from starvation.

Paraja is one of the milestone novels on human rights. The novel deals with the life of the Parajas, a tribe in the Koraput District of Orissa.

The protagonist of the novel is Sukru Jani, a widower who has two sons - Mandia and Tikra, and two daughters - Jili and Bili. Life is not a bed of roses for this simple man, as he has to work hard to make both ends meet. Sukru's girls suffer from poverty. We find how Jili and Bili strive to exist through grinding poverty.

As Jili stared at her empty stores of grain, a hundred forgotten incidents came back to her - little insults and humiliations from those who had been her friends, and neglect and indifference. She was filled with a sense of shame.

They live a life of not only poverty but also of exploitation and abuse. Jili and Bili too face the brunt of a harsh life. We must keep in mind the fact that life is no longer beautiful for the young girls.

In such conditions it is hard to talk about any rights, may it be for children or adults. But children who are intended to be kept out of the life's scholar, is forced to experience all the bitter blows of life from the very morning each day until night when they are agonized and frustrated and are forced to question certain fundamental questions like why they cannot get a square meal when they are working so hard, or why are they called untouchables or why they are so poor despite their toils?

Deteriorating health and increasing Malnutrition:

Another major problem very much attached to their living conditions is the factor of Deteriorating health and increasing malnutrition in these slums because of lack of adequate nutrition and money to buy food for the entire family. Deaths of children in these slums are very common and we see how the doctors refuse treatment either because they are unable to pay a price for the treatment or they are hesitant to serve the low-caste.

Their Deteriorating health is hugely caused by malnutrition, ignorance and lack of proper medical facilities in the villages. The doctors and Vaidis try to stay away from the poor as they cannot pay proper prices for the treatment and above all they avoid treating or entering the low caste people places as they are overweight with caste prejudices. Both *Untouchable* and *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* describe the plight of the helpless patient when taken to the doctor. The negligence on the part of the society for not providing health care to the poor children is a huge violation of human rights that is

left unregarded by the contemporary administration and mind set of the elite. It is not only a violation of fundamental right but also of the fundamental needs of having food and health facilities.

Valmiki describes one such incident, among the most powerful in the text. His community looked forward to marriage feasts in the village when they would gather outside with big baskets. After the guests had eaten, 'the dirty leaf plates, were put in the Chuhras' baskets, which they took home, to save the joothan sticking to them.' At the end of one such marriage feast, Valmiki's mother requested the Brahmin host for additional food for her children, only to be humiliated and told to mind her place, be satisfied with what she already had collected, and to get going. Valmiki writes:

That night the Mother Goddess Durga entered my mother's eyes. It was the first time I saw my mother so angry. She emptied the basket right there. She said to Sukhdev Singh, 'Pick it up and put it inside your house. Feed it to the baratis tomorrow morning.' She gathered me and my sister and left like an arrow. Sukhdev Singh had pounced on her to hit her, but my mother had confronted him like a lioness. Without being afraid.

This is how the poor people were even neglected of eaten food as well. It's lead to health problem among the children.

Issues of Child Labour:

In Paraja, we see the free play of child labour and witness the terrific results in the end. Not only are Tikra, Mandia, Jili and Bili away from their healthy childhood, they are unaware of the feeling of pampered love and enjoyment as a child. Poverty makes them matured from their infancy and they know that they should not ask for a bellyful or nag for any ever-desired object.

Another great example on child labour is of Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea*. Desai brings forth the issues of the violation of child rights and points out the free play of child labour even in big cities like Bombay.

Desai's portrayal of the plight of children is life-like but fantastic. It is very distinct in Desai's portrayal that the elders in Thul are aware of the necessity of education in children. That is why we see that the children go to school eagerly and cherish love for education, but it is poverty that keeps them from going to school. Hari is forced to think like an adult for his family's livelihood and Lila like a matured woman is worried about the future of her family. Desai brings this very contention in little day to day activities of the children. As Hari returns frustrated to his hut empty handed unable to get any fish or vegetable for food, he sees his sisters Bela and Kamal skipping and playing with square pebbles. It is very astonishing to learn that in between their games they think of their scarcity and responsibility. The girls seeing Hari empty handed mocks him for not bringing anything. Hari accuses them of soiling their skirts in the mud. It is in their conversation that we realise that Lila had become the mother surrogate for them. "Lila will wash it." Even though they realise that the work pressure of Lila was in excess and detergent is expensive, yet they try to keep to the fact that it's everybody's responsibility and Lila being a mother-like will do the most. As Hari is accused of not bringing anything, Hari retorts saying, "You took home some molluses, didn't you?"

There are two things to be noted in this small conversation between the siblings. First, the children are conscious of their work while playing, which is a gross child right violation as children should have the free mind and time to play and leisure. And second, we see Hari's inability or frustration that he wants to make up with the issue that Bela had taken some mollusk at home for a meal. Here we see each other inexpressibly expressing two ideas- one, that they are a unit to keep up

the family and second, all are noting each other's strife to keep up though everyone at heart wants to lead a life of a child, laughing, playing, imagining, and not working hard to get some petty material for food after being abused and frustrated. We are also pained to see them feasting on some molluscs which are not considered as comfortable in the food list.

Karukku being a vivid documentation of the Tamil Dalit Christian society in South India also portrays poverty and child labour in children. Bama describes the hardships of the Dalit Christian men, women and children throughout the day only to earn a square meal a day. Especially children need a commendable attention in this section as we find how inhumane they are worked out only for fulfilling their own hunger. When they are babies, they are tied at the back of their mother and are carried to work where they do not get food on time, a proper place to sit or play. As soon as the children grow up to be ten or twelve years of age they would go and find some way of making money.

"Until that time, they'd go about carrying their younger siblings on their hips. They'd even gather a few twigs and sticks and learn to boil a little gruel. It was always the girl children who had to look after all the chores at home...."

Bama criticizes the situation that,

In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense of schooling, and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies, and doing household chores...."

Here Bama consciously or unconsciously while describing her childhood and other children do not forget to notice the differentiation of boundaries of work allotted to a boy child and a girl child. A girl has to do the household chores confined in the boundary of the house whereas the boys were free to go out places with sheep and cattle which were comparatively easier than the household chores. She sums in the end and rationalizes with the practical but bitter truth that a girl child is marginalised heavily and has to sacrifice her childhood more than a boy stuck in the kitchen and agricultural works. Such is the effect of poverty, illiteracy, lack of health care and lack of care for the humanity. In this way the Indian novelists have very aptly depicted the concept of human rights and it's impotence in their works.

Conclusion:

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 religion, casts, class, sex, sect language and rich and poor. With heartfelt thanks to Dr. B. R Ambedkar with his great efforts we got the right of expression and speech the champion of human rights. He said 'My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself'

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