



LITERATURE, ACTIVISM, HUMAN VALUES: THEN AND NOW

- 1) Ragini Singh
- 2) Muskan Singh
- 3) Bhanvi Parashar
- 4) Jhanvi Dutta
- 5) Adeeb Umar
- 6) Kritika Singhal

Students of Amity University, Noida.

INTRODUCTION

Literature, Activism, and Human Values have areflect a more just and equitable society. In this context, "Then and Now" refers to comparing the literature and activism of past eras to the present, exploring how they have evolved over time while addressing enduring human values. This topic offers an opportunity to delve into the ways literature and activism have influenced each other, shaping societal perceptions and driving positive transformations in our world. By examining the historical context and comparing it to the current state, we can better understand the role of literature, activism, and human values in shaping our society's past, present, and future. Ultimately, Literature, Activism, Human Values: Then and Now aims to spark conversations and reflections on the transformative power of literature, the importance of activism as a means to effect change, and the enduring significance of human values in shaping a just and inclusive society. It invites readers to appreciate the connections between literature, activism, and human values and to critically engage with the stories that shape our world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary activism as using literature to challenge oppressive systems, advocate for marginalized voices and initiate discussions about social concerns and highlights the power of storytelling to connect readers with unfamiliar experiences. (King,2015). Literature challenges dominant narratives, creates empathy and inspires action. (Shady E.Crosogrove ,2008) Highlights the critical role of popular resistance in bringing about political change. (Rosca Ninotchka,1987) Literature turns into an effective instrument for these authors to interact with and criticize the socio-political environment, allowing voiceless- marginalized voices to speak.(Betty Wilson,2020) The belief that art is essential to the healing of civilizations, encouraging artists to carry on with their work even in the face of hardship.(Toni Morrison,1991) Explores the moral responsibilities of various stakeholders in upholding and advancing human rights. (Claude, Richard Pierre, and Burns H. Weston,1992) The narrative dimensions of human rights, acknowledging a gap in current scholarship.(Langlois, Anthony J,2005) Narratives serve as a

medium for individuals and societies to process and communicate traumatic events. (Caruth, Cathy, 1996)

ANALYSIS

Objective: This analysis explores the power of literature as a tool for activism and social change. It examines various works of literature, including Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, that address social injustices, advocate for equality, and bring attention to human rights violations. The analysis also delves into the role of narratives in shaping our understanding of human rights and the impact of trauma on individuals and communities.

"Toni Morrison *Beloved: Remembering the Body as a Historical Text*,"- offers significant insights into the themes of social justice and human values in contemporary literature, focusing specifically on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Highlights the connection between social justice and human values. The author argues that by exploring the repercussions of slavery on individuals and society, Morrison's novel addresses social injustices and advocates for equality and empathy. The protagonist, Sethe, represents the suffering endured by African-Americans during slavery and reminds readers of the importance of acknowledging and rectifying past wrongs. (Toni Morrison,1991)

"Reading for Peace: Literature as Activism" -ability of literature to foster peace and social change. Highlights the literature that tackle issues such as conflict, discrimination, and trauma, aiming to bring about empathy and understanding among readers. The article argues that works of literature can create spaces for dialogue, cultivate critical thinking, and inspire action. Emphasizes the role of literary events, book clubs, and reading groups in promoting literature as a tool for activism.(Shady E Crosogrove,2008)

Highlights the power of literature to challenge oppressive regimes and offers a glimpse into the risks faced by writers engaging in activism. (Rosca Ninotchka,1987).

"Literature as activism – an investigation into new literary ethics and the novel" delves into the concept of literature as activism and explores how literature can serve as a tool for social change. It highlights that activism through literature involves an ethical engagement with political, social, and environmental issues. (Dorothy J Hale and James Phelan 2006)

"Trauma, Testimony, and Human Rights: Women's Atrocity Narratives from Postcolonial India" focuses on the intersection of literature, trauma, and human rights in the context of postcolonial India. It examines how women writers use literature as a form of testimony to bring attention to human rights violations and advocate for social justice. (Pramoad K Nayar,2007)

"Networks, Literary Activism, and the Production of World Literature"-literary activism and networks in the production and dissemination of world literature. It emphasizes the importance of collective action and collaboration in promoting literature as a tool for social and political change on a global scale. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o,1972)

"The Narrative Metaphysics of Human Rights," explores the role of narratives in the construction and understanding of human rights. He argues that literature plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of human rights by offering narratives that challenge dominant ideologies and expose the realities of human rights abuses. Through storytelling, literature can challenge oppressive power structures and give voice to marginalized communities.(Langolis,2005)

"Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History," analyzes the relationship between trauma, narrative, and memory. She argues that literature has the power to bear witness to the traumatic experiences of individuals and communities. By giving voice to trauma, literature can raise awareness and promote healing. Caruth's work highlights the importance of literature in addressing the psychological and emotional impact of human rights abuses. (Caruth, 1996)

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* can both be read as examples of what King calls "literary activism"—socially conscious literature that illuminates underrepresented histories and viewpoints (King, 2022). As Wilson explains, how literature turns into an effective instrument for these authors to interact with and criticize the socio-political environment *Sea of Poppies* paints a complicated picture of the many effects of British imperial policies in India in the 1830s, ranging from the rapacious opium trade to the inhumane treatment of indentured workers (Wilson, 2020). Similar to what Udel investigates regarding Native American women's literature, *The Lowland* reveals the human costs of political dissent through the account of Udayan's radicalization while focusing on the underappreciated history of the Naxalite movement in 1960s Calcutta (Udel, 2007)

"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" by Arundhati Roy and "The Sympathizer" by Viet Thanh Nguyen exemplify literary activism by utilizing their narratives to challenge dominant discourses, create empathy, and shed light on societal injustices. These novels align with Stephen King's views on the power of literature in effecting social change. While also acknowledging Riosca Ninotchka's arguments on the rise of individualized narratives, it is evident that both works contribute to the discourse on literary activism through their insightful reflections and engagement with contemporary social issues.

In Yuval Harari's "Sapiens" aligns with the insights discussed in Pramod K. Nayar's article on trauma, testimony, and human rights. Both pieces emphasize the role of trauma in shaping human history and the significance of sharing personal experiences to foster understanding and empathy. By recognizing the impact of trauma and testimonial practices, societies can strive towards upholding human rights and preventing future abuses.

Conclusion

Through the examination of different literary works, this analysis underscores the transformative potential of literature as a form of activism. It highlights the ability of literature to challenge oppressive power structures, raise awareness about social and political issues, and give voice to marginalized communities. By bearing witness to trauma and advocating for social justice, literature serves as a powerful tool in promoting empathy, understanding, and positive change.

WORKS CITED

King, "What Is Literary Activism?", 2015.

Toni Morrison, "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear: In Times of Dread,

Artists Must Never Choose to Remain Silent", *The Nation*, 23 March 2015,

<https://www.thenation.com/article/no-place-self-pity-no-room-fear/>.

Rosca, Ninotchka. *Endgame: The Fall of Marcos*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1987.

———. *Jose Maria Sison: At Home in the World*, co-authored with Jose Maria Sison.

Green

Ninotchka Rosca's State of War and Jessica Hagedorn's Dogeaters: Revisioning the Philippines." Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration. Ed. Geoffrey Kain. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1997. 115–27. sboro: Open Hand, 2004.

Achebe, Chinua. 1990 (1988). Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays. New York: Anchor Books.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2000. "New Literature, New Theory?" *Matatu* 7: 57–89.

Chinunda, Emmanuel. D. 2014. *Grappling with Change in Africa: The Dream of Prosperity*

Using African Wisdom. London: Author House Dabiri, Emma. 2016. "Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan." *Journal of African*

Cultural Studies 28 (1): 104–8.

Shady E. Cosgrove, "Reading for Peace? Literature as Activism: An Investigation into New Literary Ethics and the Novel" (paper presented at Activating Human Rights and Peace: Universal Responsibility Conference, Southern Cross University, New South Wales, 1–4 July 2008) (emphasis in original).

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1995).

Yanick Lahens, *Aunt Résia and the Spirits and Other Stories*, trans. Betty Wilson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

Edwidge Danticat, "Foreword", in *ibid.*, viii.

Marie-Agnès Sourieau, "Afterword", in *ibid.*, 203.

Richard Burton quoted in Marie-Agnès Sourieau, "Afterword", in Gisèle Pineau, *Exile: According to Julia*, trans. Betty Wilson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 185, note 5.

Cosgrove, "Reading for Peace?" 2008

Betty Wilson, "Marie Chauvet (Marie Vieux): Love", in Mordecai and Wilson, *Her True-True Name*, 84, 85, 87.

Bailat-Jones, review.

Weston, Bums. "Human Rights." *Human Rights in the World Community: Issues And Action*. Ed. Richard Pierre Claude and Bums H. Weston. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Uof Pennsylvania P, 1992. 12-29

Langlois, Anthony J. "The Narrative Metaphysics of Human Rights." *Journal of Human Right* B9 3 Q005}:369-87

Caruth., Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996

Jeyito, Biodun. "Okonkwo and His Mother: Things Fall Apart and Issues of Gender in the Constitution of African Postcolonial Discourse." *Callaloo* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1993)

Brooks, Linda Maric. "Testimonials Poetics of Performance." *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.2 (2005): 181-222.

Bergner, Gwen. "Politics and Pathologies: On the Subject of Race in Psychoanalysis." *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Anthony C. Alessandrini. New York: Routledge, 1999.