

CONTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to explore the contribution of literature in promoting sustainable development. Various literary works are critically analysed to examine how literature can raise awareness about environmental issues, promote social justice, gender equity and inspire individual and collective action towards sustainability. Literature can be considered as the mother of all knowledge. It is made of the life experiences. It has the power to shape our perceptions, values, and behaviors. The United Nations have framed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Literature can play a crucial role in attaining these goals as literature is closely related to culture. And both literature and culture are connected to sustainability. By investigating the connections between literature, culture, and sustainability, this paper exhibits the potential of literature to contribute to a more equitable and environmentally conscious world.

KEYWORDS: literature, Sustainable Development Goals, environment, social justice, gender equity.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a purely human phenomenon. It is a means by which human beings present their experiences, thoughts, ideas, emotions and feelings. Literature is about life and the people in relation to the social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and all the other aspects of life. It is about interpersonal as well as intrapersonal relations. It aims to entertain and educate the readers. Literature educates people by making them aware about various global issues. The modern world has emerged with huge rapid materialistic development which has been drastically affecting the environmental, social and economic human balance. To attain development the natural resources are being exploited to an extreme level that may damage the harmony of over-all life on the globe. That is why the UNO have been putting efforts to make development sustainable. Literature is the mirror of life. It presents the pressing issues of the society and tries to provide solutions to them. No doubt, literature is fictitious but it is very useful for enlightenment and awakening of people. There are plenty of literary works across all the genres that highlight the sustainable development goals and make readers aware of the serious problems which have incurred due to materialistic development. Some literary works discuss the influence of development on environmental, social and economic aspects of life.

Sustainable development is a pressing global issue, requiring immediate attention and action. The United Nations' SDGs highlight the need for a holistic approach to sustainability, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Literature, as a powerful tool for shaping cultural narratives and influencing individual and collective behaviors, has a significant role to play in promoting sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a method to satisfy needs of the people today without depriving future generations of their needs. It is an approach that balances diverse requirements against the consciousness of the environmental, economic and social limitations that a society has. According to *Our Common Future* which is also known as Brundtland Report, 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'¹

Today's world has grave environmental challenges like climate change, freshwater exhaustion, deforestation, air and water pollution, and hunger. Natural resources are either running out or are being polluted due to the rapid and huge development. There is a need to utilize the earth's resources sensibly and

preserve and conserve them for the future generations. Sustainable development emphasizes the improvement of human-environment interaction through prioritization of the management and protection of the natural resources for coming generations. Through the conservation and enhancement of our natural resources all the nations can satisfy the basic needs of employment, food, water, energy and sanitation. The natural resources can be conserved and enhanced by promoting stable economic growth, conservation of natural resources, environmental protection, social progress and equality.

Further, sustainable development is an attitude to development. It considers various necessities against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations a society faces. It propagates the social responsibility to use the natural resources wisely and sensibly so that the balance of the nature is not disturbed. To attain this, in September, 2015 the countries under the UNO adopted 17 sustainable development goals. These goals are – 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health and well-being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry innovation and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequalities, 11. Sustainable cities and communities, 12. Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17. Partnerships for the goals. The sustainability has the three pillars, namely, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability which cover all the goals of sustainable development. They are interconnected. Literature has proved to be an effective means of promotion of matters in the society. It has been used to promote all the above mentioned sustainable development goals. Out of the seventeen sustainable development goals literature primarily promotes the SDGs like – no poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, peace and justice by pointing out their actual state as prevailed in the society. The present paper is a humble attempt to consider the contribution of literature in attaining sustainable development.

Contribution of Literature in Creating Environmental Awareness:

Literature is a powerful means of creating environmental awareness. It has long been used to raise awareness about environment. Literary works like Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" (1962), Margaret Atwood's "The Year of the Flood" (2009), Prabhakar Pendarkar's "Rarang Dhang" (1981) and Dilip Chitre's "Felling of the Banyan Tree" (1980) have highlighted the devastating impacts of human activities on the natural world. Even the contemporary English novels like Vander Meer's "Annihilation" (2014) and Claire Vaye Watkins' "Gold Fame Citrus" (2015) continue to explore and alarm the consequences of environmental degradation.

Let us see some details about "Felling of the Banyan Tree" a famous poem by Dilip Chitre who was a respected and versatile Indian artist. He was a popular poet. He wrote in both English and Marathi. "Felling of the Banyan Tree" was first published in Chitre's collection of poems entitled, *Traveling in a Cage* in 1980. It is a free verse poem consisting of three stanzas, with in all twenty five lines. Its central theme is uprootedness of modern human beings. The secondary theme of the poem is the destruction of ecosystems for monetary gain in the name of progress and its impact on environment and human life.

The persona tells that his father asked all the tenants to vacate their houses so that the houses could be demolished. Then all the houses except one in which the persona's family lived were destroyed. The persona's father ordered to fell the trees there. Then all the trees like neem, sheoga, audumbar, and others were cut down. The persona's grandmother suggested not to fell the trees as they are sacred and felling them is a crime but the father did not listen to her and all the trees were massacred. The word, massacre shows the beingness of trees. But felling the enormous banyan tree was a big problem as it was thrice the size of the persona's house. The circumference of its trunk was about fifty feet. Its aerial roots were thirty feet long and they touched the ground. It was the house for multitude of insects and birds. But the father ordered to cut the banyan tree down.

The insects and birds were disturbed. In a way the ecosystem was disturbed. It took fifty men to fell the banyan tree whose slaughter was fearsome and fascinating. Soon after that the persona's family moved to Bombay where there were not many trees. And the persona could see the tree in dreams only.

The poem creates environmental awareness. It shows the difference between the serene and satisfactory greenery of trees and the jungle of cement concrete buildings. And it points out that if the trees are cut down in this way the future generations will have to see the trees only in dreams. The poem promotes the sustainable development from the environmental dimension.

Contribution of Literature in Promoting Social Justice:

Literature has two goals: to entertain and to educate. In some cases literature has been the cause of social revolutions erupted to attain social justice which is a key dimension of sustainable development. Literary works such as Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes were Watching God" (1937) and Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (1958) have focused the life of marginalized communities. Similarly, works of Mulk Raj Anand promote social justice for the downtrodden people and communities in the Indian society. His novel "Untouchable" (1981) presents the miserable life of the untouchable and provides the possible solutions to the problem of untouchability. The argument for eradicating the caste system is at the centre of the novel. It presents a day in the life of a young sweeper boy, Bakha whose work is to clean latrines. The same is promoted by Omprakash Valmiki in his poem, "What would you do?" (2008).

Similarly, the recent novel, "Foreign" (2013) by Sonara Jha is the projection of the plight of farmers in Vidarbha, India. The novel discusses the haplessness of the farmers, their desperation and depression, the indifference of government, selfishness of moneylenders, corrupt government officers, and the farmers' protest. The novel successfully publicizes the agonies and plight of hapless farmers in India. Jha makes Indian farmers' suicides a global concern.

Contribution of Literature in Promoting Gender Equity:

In the male-dominated society, woman is always victimized. She is brought up in such a way that she accepts that she is born to suffer and serve the man. Literature has been exploring the life of women and their miseries to the world and promoting gender equity so as to give justice to women. For instance, Arun Kolatkar's portrayal of woman in his poem 'Woman' (2004) is as per the existing reality in the society. Selflessness is cultivated in the woman to serve the selfishness in the man. This radical poem protests against the injustice, oppression, and exploitation done to the woman in the cruel and crafty male-dominated culture. Similarly, Kishor Kale in his autobiography, *Against All Odds* (2000) presents the stories of Kolhati women and shows that their life is tied with *ghungroos* of the rich lusty men who want just to use them and throw them away like a cheap object. The book brought a kind of reformation in the Kolhati women and many of them started taking education and change their hellish life.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, literature has a vital role to play in promoting sustainable development. It can raise awareness about environmental issues. It is an effective tool to promote social justice and gender equity. It can contribute to a more equitable and environmentally conscious world. As the world contends with the challenges of sustainability, literature can serve as a powerful tool for shaping cultural narratives and influencing individual and collective behaviours.

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