

Literary Artists on Sustainable Development: A Critical Study of English Literature.

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Abstract

Modern human beings who have been enjoying enormous benefits of science and technology are very much concerned with environmental issues and sustainable development. In various fields development has been being done but a question peeps in mind whether that development in a true sense is sustainable or not. Again the existing external environment is being threatened by the rapid progress in the name of development. It creates a conflict between the better environment and the rapid scientific and technological development. It prompts the social thinkers, scientists, technologists, philosophers and even the writers who review the situation in the world and try to find out a suitable solution to come out of the crisis. Normally it is not expected that the literary writers would talk about new scientific inventions. But the impact of new inventions on human society is very much traceable in the literary compositions mainly of the Victorian and Modern British authors. We may give a fresh look into the literary works of William Wordsworth, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and others about their thoughts concerned with development. The objective of the research paper is to explore the ideas of these writers in connection with so called environmental issues and sustainable development. These writers have hinted that the external development by the rampant use of science and technology perhaps cannot develop human society in real sense. Rather the so called development has put human society in new troubles in the psychic world.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable, Development, Industrial, Technology, Human, External, Values, Economic, Environmental, Literature.

INTRODUCTION

The term - Sustainable Development is generally related with four areas of human life – human, economic, industrial and environmental. It indicates that the development does not mean only one particular field of human life. The development is closely related with each section and not a single area would be overlooked. Again the progress is not at all temporary and short termed; it would continue for a longer period from generation to generation. In fact any kind of development in the world is to be targeted for the overall development of human beings. But in the 21st century it is very much visible that a kind of external development is going on fast, mainly in the field of industrial and economic fields. Again the ecological system of the universe is in danger it appears. At the same time the basic human qualities have been vanishing from human life and some habits which are the products of so called development have been challenging the modern human beings at present. The external development has

been changing the traditional lifestyle of human beings and as a result the people have been facing a complex situation. The inner psyche is also constantly being disturbed and they are in a traumatic situation. They fail to follow that traditional lifestyle and at the same time are afraid of embracing the new phases of life. The human values which are cherished by the people have been vanishing from our lives.

Till today many experts in various fields, the philosophers and writers have expressed their own opinions in their own style regarding sustainable development. In one hand the scientists, the technologists, business experts, environmentalists and economists have been presenting their views to make the development a sustainable one. On the other hand the authors – the poets, the novelists, the dramatists and short story writers mainly have also observed the nature and human life in the world and side by side their views on how to develop the existing human life are also exposed in their literary works. They have also depicted the crude impact of so called economic and industrial development on nature as well as on human beings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the paper entitled “Sustainable Development : a Guide to the Literature”, Diana Mitlin, an economist describes different types of sustainable development mainly of economic and ecological development. Side by side she has also talked about the contribution of literature which talked about sustainable development specially in case of the control of rapid growth of population and environmental degradation.

In the research paper, “The Sustainable Development Goals in Scientific Literature : A Bibliometric Overview at the Meta level”, a scientific researcher Christene Meschede wants to tell that the research works related to sustainable development have been increased undoubtedly but she opined that new scientific parameters should be incorporated for the proper understanding of the negative causes for overall development. Besides she hoped that in future the data exchange among the SDGs and fund availability for the research from funding agencies could be more conducive.

In the research article entitled “I want to teach Sustainable Development in My English Classroom : A Case Study of Incorporating Sustainable Development Goals in English Teaching”, the researcher Ching Ting Tany Kwee has remarked that it is very necessary to incorporate English Teacher’s experience into social cognitive career theory. She also has expressed her views that teachers’ self efficacy develops through out the implementation of the teachers experience.

In the research article entitled “THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF LITEARATURE IN NIGERIA FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS : PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES”, Ogunaike has opined that for achieving sustainable goals in the education section of Nigeria the course, Literature - in English which is taught at the secondary level cannot be left out specially for the reason that its rules are considered. Literature can play a tremendous role in achieving the goals which include the sensitization of the citizens and awareness of their societal rules, education and entertainment, expression of cultural values etc. It is also opined by the scholar that Literature in English should a compulsory course for the secondary level students in schools.

In a research article entitled “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Their Impact on English Literature “ the researcher Mariyan Farzan has generally presented her views that the literary writers can contribute a lot in case of sustaining development. She has specifically talked about the contribution of

the writers in the field of education , social injustice , fostering peace & justice and , empowering women . She wants to tell that in these particular areas the English Literary writers can promote the goals of SDGS and above all human development in their writings .

OBJECTIVE

The study aims to explore the role of writers in English literature in connection with sustainable development. Specially after the industrial revolution a great change occurred in the field of industry , economy , environment and human life. The conventional lifestyle has been gradually shifting to a new phase of life pattern which is closely related with external progress and these external progress has put a deep impression on human life and their philosophy. Due to the rapid development specially in the urban areas people were facing a kind of dilemma. This research paper is tried to disclose how the prominent writers of Romantic age, Victorian age and Modern age have presented the crisis situation and expose their own views in the literary works. The paper mainly will deal with Wordsworth, Mathew Arnold , T.S.ELIOT, Kamala das , Henrik Ibsen, Elmer Rice who have painted the real scenario of so called development and the influence of it in human psychic world. The scope of the study is limited within the romantic period , Victorian period and modern age in English Literature.

DISCUSSION

one of the most important events of 18th century is the French revolution which has a tremendous effects on various spheres of human life. Its motto is – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity ; the essence of this motto has influenced a lot the literary works. In English Literature it is visibly exposed in the romantic revival. The poets have focused on the rural human life surrounded by natural settings and shifted from portrayal of urban human civilization. They have escaped from the din and bustles of city life. The well known poet William Wordsworth has given a message that the children must be brought up in the lap of Nature by Nature through his ‘Lucy poems’. His another poem ‘ The world is too much with us’ vividly presents the effect of industrialisation on human beings. Again in his famous poem Tintern Abbey he has suggested that nature should be worshipped for the upbringing of human civilization which is termed as Pantheism. Infact Wordsworth is indicating that human life cannot be prospered in proper way without taking care of nature. In no way external industrial or economic development is possible without giving any importance to environmental issues . In the Victorian age the technology has been improved and utilised for the industrial and economic development rampantly. The people of the western world have become very much crazy to embrace the benefits of the external development . That type of mentality is presented in a poetic form by a famous poet of the age Lord Tennyson in the poem ‘The Lotus Eater’ ; but the type of greediness for so called development does not bring the total benefits to human civilization. His famous words –

“ Water water water everywhere

But there is no water to drink” clearly indicate that the so called development in the society is not helpful for the overall development of human beings .

Another famous poet and critic of the Victorian age Mathew Arnold has exposed the crisis of human civilization which is the by-product of economic and industrial development. Undoubtedly human beings have been developing externally but they have been being also largely effected by the crisis of industrial development. The moral and human values have been eroding from human life gradually and

they have been becoming the victims of uncertainty, disbelief and unknown fear. That is artistically presented in his poem 'Dover Beach'. He has also hinted a way out to overcome the critical situation by exercising friendship with each other. In the Victorian age human beings are victims of lack of faith and it can be overcome only by making friendship. Indication is quite clear that the poet has given emphasis on some human values for the improvement of human civilization.

The most prominent poet, critic and dramatist T.S. Eliot has clearly called human beings of modern age as hollow people in his poem 'The Hollow Man'. They are only possessing the external skeleton devoid of all basic human qualities. Again in his remarkable poem 'The Waste Land' he has compared the world or human society as a totally rotten land where nothing new and positive can be cultivated. But at the end of the poem the poet has pointed out a solution to solve the critical issue depending on the essence of sacrifice. It is clear now the modern human civilization which is badly affected by the vices of so-called development may come out of the crisis depending on some inner human values. The poem is ended with these lines-

“ These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronimo's mad againe.
Datta . Dayadhvam . Damayata.
Shantih shantih shantih”

In 20th century overall development of human society has not been achieved by the rapid external development. Rather human life is tormented by some cropped up issues like uneven distribution of property, the rampant torture of the lower class society by upper class section, and the unending torture on women in the world etc. The two great dramatists of 20th century – George Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy have vividly presented big issues in their dramatic works. 'Arms and the Man' by Bernard Shaw is a glaring example of the irrational thinking about love and war. Bernard Shaw has explained how a sacred notion of love is destroyed by the conventional social system. The concept of war is highly romantic to the people and the dramatists have shattered this view by a rational outlook. In fact Bernard Shaw has tried his level best to improvise the mental make up of the people by pushing a rational scientific approach. John Galsworthy has presented how poor people are tortured brutally by the upper section of people even in the modern age. The hero, Falder in the drama 'Justice' was bound to commit suicide due to inhuman torture on him by the rich upper class people of the society. The heroine of the drama Ruth Honeywell was bound to turn into a prostitute simply in order to earn her livelihood with her two little children. Everyday night she was brutally tortured by her drunkard husband. It is clear the poor section of the people did not get any relief even for the so-called economic and industrial growth. Their sufferings have not been reduced at all. Human values have already been abolished from modern society.

The pathetic condition of women even in the modern male dominated society has been dramatised by Henrik Ibsen in 'A Doll's House'. Heroine of the drama Nora Helmer has been treated as a doll in her family – father's house and husband's house. At the end of the drama she has understood as a human being she has no identity. So the dramatist Henrik Ibsen has presented the fact that the half of the population of the world are not given the scope for developing themselves naturally. They are forcefully cowed down. So it proves that the social rapid development in the modern age did not give any benefit to the women.

The picture is almost the same in the Indian male dominated society i.e described by Kamala Das in her poems . In every stage of life they are dominated by the patriarchal society. They are turned into dwarf or distorted persons.

“dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife , they said . Be embroiderer , be cook,

Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in.”

Due to that type of tremendous pressure women have turned into patients of psychological disorders.

The famous American dramatist Elmer Rice has presented in his drama the dehumanising effect of rapid industrialisation in his most important three plays- The Adding Machine, The Subway and Street Scene where he has shown how human beings are crushed by the heavy weight of modern industrial civilization. The three main characters of the play – Zero , Sophie and Mrs Maurant are seen destroyed by the modern industrial civilizations. So it is quite clear that the dramatist Elmer Rice has disclosed the fact that the industrial development is not the only parameter to make a man better.

Conclusion

It is observed that for the improvement of human civilization the economic and industrial development are very much necessary but these are not the only parameters to transform human beings into a better phase of life. It is felt that human development is also a very important factor which should be given emphasis . The critical understanding of modern age indicates that human development is very much essential along with other parameters of sustainable development. The prominent writers of English literature like Wordsworth , Lord Tennyson , Mathew Arnold , T.S.Eliot , John Galsworthy, Kamala Das ,Elmer Rice and many other has shown the brutality and dehumanising message of the so called development on modern human society. They have indicated also that the inner human values are to be retained and nurtured for the overall development of human society. The views of the writers as exposed in their writings may usher in a new path for the betterment of human civilization in the critical juncture. Actually it has become very clear that these writers express that without the development of human values sustainable development cannot be completely attained only depending on the economic , industrial and environmental development. These three external development would be useless without the human development. But till today importance is not given on human development so emphatically as now-a-days importance is given on other three sectors.

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