



# The Universality of Human Rights: Contending Debates

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## ABSTRACT

*There have been long debates among anthropologists and philosophers on the issue whether moral values are universal or relative to the cultural context in which it emerges. Presently this debate has become significant in the discourse of international human rights theory as the often-presumed universality of human rights standards have been objected to by both the scholars and politicians, arguing that the validity and meaning of human rights are relative to particular cultural, social, and political contexts. The Universalist versus Relativist debate has been strikingly complex, requiring consideration of fundamental and, perhaps, irresolvable issues regarding morals, the nature of rights, and the philosophical foundations of human rights. Different significant and theoretical questions on the aforementioned issue have been considered in the present discussion.*

**KEYWORDS :** Human Rights, UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, UNO, Universalism, Cultural Relativism, neo- Kantianism, Postmodernist, Communitarians, 'moral contextualism', 'good society', 'state of nature', Bangkok Declaration, Vienna Declaration.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the seeming "death" of political ideologies (Bell, 1960), there is no doubt that the discourse of human rights is likely to become the normative political discourse of the future. Human rights apply to everyone from the fact of being human (Cranston, 1962), irrespective of nationality, sex, material status and occupation. These rights are regarded as the basis of a just society. With the adaptation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by General Assembly of United Nations Organization (UNO) on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948, human rights have become one of the central pillars of international policy and order.

At the heart of thinking, practicing and implementing Human Rights is the dilemma between making them sufficiently general, abstract and universal, so as to entitle individuals and collectives across gender, race, color, class, language, age, sexual preferences, and religious distinctions and the imperative of making them context specific, concrete and particular, so as to effectively implement them to protect specific individuals and groups experiencing particular modes of marginalization and denial of socio-economic mobility. Human Rights, therefore, essentially refers to those rights that are accrued to us for just being human, and thus, 'the subject of Human Rights are not members of this or that society, but of the community of humankind' (Vincent, 1986: 9). It is this vision that enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as 'a common standard of achievement for all people's and all nations'.

The idea of the universality of human rights emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the UN Declaration of Human rights on the belief that the basic values and principles underlying the concept of human rights are of a universal nature. These values and principles included the concept of individual liberty and freedoms, the belief in democracy and political rights, the acknowledgement of social and economic right. This idea can be found in the views of Maurice Cranston. He defines human rights as, "A human right by definition is a universal moral right, something which all men, at all times, ought to have, something of which no one may be deprived without a grave affront to justice, something which is owing to every human being simply because he is human." (Ibid, 1962: 40) Following the words of the preamble of UDHR, Peter R. Baehr, another expert of human rights, has also portrayed the universal spirit of this discourse:

Human rights are internationally agreed values, standards or rules regulating the conduct of states towards their own citizens and non-citizens... These rules, which states have imposed upon themselves, serve to restrict the freedom of states to act towards their entire population: citizens as well as non-citizens, men as well as

women, adults as well as children, whites and non-whites, believers and non-believers, married persons and the unmarried, heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. This situation is different from the past, when states, or rather their princes, were absolute sovereigns who could treat their subjects in any way they wanted. Nowadays, human beings have rights: human rights (Baehr, 2001: 1).

But, currently there have been various debates both from scholars and politicians that human rights are not universal and as the cultural diversity is also an essential dynamic for the progress of a society, particularly in the non-western states, so that no universal principle can overrule the cultural norm. Defenders of this view argue that human rights put the individual above the community which goes against the communitarian values.

## 2. THE DEBATE

In the discourse of human rights perhaps the most essential and contested issue is universality which also is important for theorization and application of human rights. The debate between human rights universalists and cultural relativists, perhaps, emerged in the mid of last century along with the adoption of UDHR. Many writers today have acknowledged that universalism is the product of European history. As a result, the center of the current debate veers away from the argument over whether or not human rights are universal rights in actuality. What concerns a good number of thinkers today is whether or not human rights "should be" universal. (For detail see, Van Ness (ed.), 1999; Jacobson & Brunn (eds.), 2000) Human rights universalism has always been challenged on the ground that it represents a form of cultural imperialism or hegemony. Having such origins, it denies communitarian values, especially of the so-called non-Western societies. In response, universalists often accuse relativists of providing excuses for legitimizing political suppression. The problem with this kind of exchange is that all sides tend to arbitrate the correct form of human existence. Unfortunately, the uncompromising stance of both parties only shifts the argument away from the fundamental issue—whether the forms of human existence and their meanings are decidable.

To sketching this debate thoroughly first we would explain the communitarian and postmodernist challenge against the Kantian view of universality. This version of communitarian and postmodernist argument will be followed by another argument where the universal validity of international law has been questioned. Finally the debate will be concluded by the discussion where the universality of various declarations on human rights and universal character of human rights instrument has been considered.

## 2.1. COMMUNITARIAN AND POSTMODERNIST CHALLENGE TO THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL AND NATURAL LAW

To establish its universal character, the discourse of human rights says that all people are part of a community and this community is superior to the existent political community of a group of those people. The universality of human rights means, all people will subscribe to a common law which is superior to the laws of their country. However, there has been no formalized status of this community and the law. Here the term community signified the community of all people, i.e. humankind and the term law interpreted as natural law which was granted in a pre-social, universal state of morality. This concept of natural law is moreover opposed to positive law that is founded in official binding, constitutional acts and rules.

Primarily, the classical political philosophers used the idea of natural law as a methodological tool to justify how the citizens should act on the basis of a philosophical reading of how they would have acted before the advent of society. It had given more importance to do with the relationship between a citizen or subject and a state or a sovereign than with the rights of all people *per se*. John Locke, the classic British political philosopher, in fact, understood natural law in this way. Hobbes and Locke together gave importance to explain people's human essence when they (the people of state of nature) did not enter into the social relationship. Practically, they more concentrated to institute the philosophical foundation for a political constitution and were less willing to offer guidelines for moral action.

Another classic, German philosopher, Kant applied the paradigm of natural law specifically from the question of morality and ethics. He asserted his view on the universal character of morality, i.e. morality is universal and also proposed that it is enunciated through the behavior of people towards one another. In this sense, Kantian moral philosophy associated with the mould for establishment of the 'good society'. There are huge differences between the two positions was advocated by Locke and Kant. In the former moral behavior among individuals was shown as pre-social condition, whereas, in the latter it was required that certain basic rights exist in some invisible, abstract realm beyond and prior to the social.

Kantian stance on the universal character of morality has been challenged by the communitarians and postmodernist. Though, both the schools of thought are known relativist, but they came from exclusively different direction. Along with criticism of the notion of universalism and Lockian idea of individualism, the communitarians also challenged the explicit 'individualism' of Kant. O'Byrne observed, "[f]or the communitarians, morality exists not in terms of liberal universal principles but in virtues; the ideal of universal morality is replaced by that of the good life, or, more specifically, the 'good society'. While Kant, ever a Platonist, believed that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things, communitarians, drawing more on Aristotle, adopt a more pragmatic stance and pay more attention to context" (O'Byrne, 2007: 38-39). Alasdair McIntyre is the most appropriate proponent of this 'moral contextualism' (McIntyre, 1981).

Thus, by arguing that rights can only be emerged in particular settings, the communitarians no doubt have adopted a relativist position on that of. The communitarians have ignored to devise such universal rules which would have to be applied in all cases. They actually are opposition to the application of universal rules and viewed that no such rules can be applied in every socio-cultural context all over the world. In lieu of that, communitarians observed that every community and society must be treated in its own context. However it should be mentioned that communitarians did not oppose the concept of rights. They just did raise an objection on its universal character. Like the communitarians, this equal view of rights has been expressed by the social constructionist. Renowned social constructionist and sociologist Malcom Waters who has been working in establishment of sociology of human rights, has observed that regardless of whether rights draw on pre-social or innate human properties, it can only be significant in a particular social situation (Waters, 1995 and 1996).

In response to the challenges that were raised by communitarians and the social constructionists against the Lockian and Kantian view of universal rights, an attempt has been sought to re-establish the universal foundations of human rights by the neo-Kantian tradition. John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas were the egregious proponents

of this tradition. Habermas and Rawls both the two thinkers, in fact, have tried to make a distinction between the ideas of universality and natural law. The neo-Kantians demanded for the existence of universal truths and said that in our actions it can be found. Here a significant difference, which could be identified relating to the idea of universality between the neo-Kantians (Habermas and Rawls) and essentialist like Kant, is the former recognize the importance to set down these universals in every day action. Practically, the neo-Kantians have resorted or taken an approach which is analogous to pragmatic. "[The new] perspective of neo-Kantianism seeks to defend the search for underlying universals (such as those found in natural law) but show how these abstract principles relate to everyday life and are, indeed, constructed and interpreted through every day action" (Op. cit, 2007: 39). This new perspective was engraved as 'moral constructivism' by Rawls.

The Kantian version of the 'state of nature', on which the classic contractarian thinking was formed and established, was modified and conferred by Rawls. Based on universally moral principles the concept of a just society which was mostly defended by Rawls, lies essentially in the idea that if the people in any pre-social arrangement would be given the choice, they would opt for a society governed by such principle, because this would be the most beneficial to them all. And, it (the just society) would be beneficial because equality and justice are the basis or ground of these universal moral principles which moreover the basis of just society. (For detail see, Rawls, 1972)

Besides, the universal principles have also been located in the practice of everyday communication by Habermas. Commenting on this O'Byrne observed:

[Habermas] stresses that in this act, which is the most basic and universal of all human practices, we are actually presupposing the existence of a consensus, and the point is to find it. As consensus is possible so, necessarily, lead to a defence of justice against injustice, equality against inequality, and freedom against oppression. This consensus is the attainment of the 'ideal speech situation', but it is dependent upon the act of communication satisfactorily achieving four validity claims which are presupposed in the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. To reach consensus (and achieve truth), Habermas says, an utterance must be comprehensible (the hearer must be able to understand it); it must be rightful (the speaker must be in an appropriate position to make it); it must be truthful (the speaker must be speaking with honesty); and it must be right (the utterance must be factually correct). Each claim is made against a different set of rules. Comprehensibility is adjudged in accordance with the rules of language itself. Rightfulness is adjudged in accordance with the normative or inter-subjective world occupied by the speaker and hearer. Truthfulness is adjudged in accordance with the subjective world of the speaker. Truth is judged in accordance with the objective world of external reality (Op. cit, 2007: 40).

Furthermore, the Kantian perspective has been extended by Tom Regan. To offer his view in this area, Regan has embodied animals and other moral patients in the moral agents, along with the rational human actors. In doing so, another set of requirements has been identified by him for making the 'ideal moral judgment' which include clarity, information, rationality, impartiality, coolness and valid moral principles, which are analogous to Habermas, (Regan, 1984: 127-30). Thus it could be said that both Regan and Habermas have tried to construct a foot-bridge between the abstract universal morality and the pragmatic social action in which ethical choice are made.

Kantian perspective of universality has been modified by another sociologist, Norberto Bobio. The so-called pre-social essentialism of the perspective of natural law has been criticized resolutely and steadily by him. It has been pointed out that any recourse to "natural, fundamental, inalienable or inviolable rights may represent a persuasive formula to back in a political publication, but has no theoretical value, and is therefore completely irrelevant to human rights theory" (Bobio, 1996: xiii).

Bobio has expressed his view from a historicist perspective. He claimed that human rights have always been the historical rights and demands that as a consequence of different social conflicts different rights emerged. For instance, according to him, the emergence of re-

ligious freedom; of civil liberties; and of political and social freedoms is the consequence of the religious war, parliamentary struggle against absolutism and workers movement, respectively (Ibid: xi). Thus an attempt to bridge the gap between universalists and relativists has been sought by Rawls, Habermas, Regan and Bobbio from universalist stands.

## 2.2. INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALITY

The concept of universality "is central to the problem of international human rights law, which is directly bound up with the issue of universalism and regionalism in respect of the promotion and protection of human rights" (Espie, 1998: 525). Universality signifies the inclusion of cultural plurality and regional specification — against this view of the advocates of universality, it has been suggested by the critiques that the understanding of universal human rights is practically western biased. However, it should also be noted that the rights to its different dimension are presupposed in many of the world's major religion, not just western ones.

It has already been mentioned that the communitarians and the postmodernists have criticized the problem of universal natural law as well as the idea of 'community' or 'good society' from relativist stands. Postmodernists viewed that the values of 'goodness' and 'truth' were abstract and meaningless. To them, it seems to be a dictatorial approach if any one suggests that one thing is ever 'better' than another. They argued that truth, justice, goodness etc. which we have made use of in our construction of history, are merely grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979). So that postmodernists have argued for relinquishment of the search for grand narratives. Instead they viewed that the world should perceive as a constant struggle between plural, competing discourses. Thus in this way the Kantian discourse has been opposed by the postmodernist. But this radical position of postmodernism, which have sought to free us from the obligation of grand narratives, has also been questioned:

The obvious problem with this radical position... is that it seems then to dispense with the whole idea of ethics, and slip into an uncontrollable relativism. If the world is made up of competing narratives, and no one should be favoured over another, then morality becomes a free market. Torture may not be preferable in our society, but it might be acceptable in others, and their opinions on the subject should be respected and considered equally as valid as ours. We should not criticize the practice of female genital mutilation because it is an accepted cultural practice (Op. cit, 2007: 43).

Against the question of the persistency or existence of universality in international human rights law and against the charge that universal human rights are western biased, was raised by the communitarians and the postmodernists, neo-Kantians took a serious stands against the communitarians and postmodernists and attempted to reconsider the question of universality by opposing them. Neo-Kantian thinker like Habermas seriously accused the postmodernists by censuring them 'as apolitical at best, conservative at worst'. Jack Donnelly, another defender of universalist perspective of international human rights law, viewed human rights as a mechanism which emerged along with the emergence of the notion of modernity and suggested that it (the mechanism) was shaped and originated to protect the human dignity from state oppression (for detail see, Donnelly, 1989; Donnelly, 1998; Donnelly, 1999). Moreover, against the indictment that universal human rights are western biased, Donnelly viewed that not only in the western cultures, but in the other non-western cultures also the sole aim of different religious or ethical guidelines has been to uphold the human dignity of the individuals. This religious or ethical guideline of non-western societies has been akin to the western societies.

## 2.3. ARE THE INTERNATIONAL DECLARATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS UNIVERSAL?

The basic assumption which has been initiated and set behind the emergence and existence of universal human rights measures is it reflects universally accepted norms of behavior. On the basis of this assumption United Nation Organization (UNO) has been supervising and observing the various the various international standards that were set to protect the human rights of individual. Moreover UNO would desiderate its universal power of supervision if no human rights would have been accepted universally. In 1948, in the UDHR,

General Assembly of UNO has approved this assumption. In the beginning of the preamble of UDHR it is stated that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation freedom, justice and peace in the world." It has also been the foundation of ICCPR and ICE-SCR both of which were adopted in 1966.

Except eight of these member state, all have articulated their support to this declaration and no negative vote was exercised by the member states to oppose the adoption of UDHR in General Assembly. The Soviet Union and five of its allies, Saudi Arabia and South Africa abstained to cast their vote. Soviet Union perceived that in the declaration very little attention has been conferred in the maintenance of state sovereignty and that is why the notion that there existed rights of the individual beyond the context of the state has been rejected by Soviet delegate Andrej Vishinskij (Op. cit, 2001: 9). The issue of freedom of opinion mentioned in UDHR was also rejected by Soviet Union commenting that the expression of fascist and racist views should not be included in it (Cassese, 1990: 37).

As the right to change one's religion is not permitted to the religious Muslim and as the aforesaid right was included under the freedom of religion in UDHR (Article 18), Saudi Arabia abstained to cast its vote. Besides, the principles of equality mentioned in Article one and two of UDHR was set aside by South Africa. Including the abovementioned critique the other often-heard condemnation was furnished (for detail see, Alston, 1983: 60-70; Nickel, 1987; Eide, et al, 1992), are mentioned herein under:

First, the UDHR was drafted at that time when most of the Third World countries were being ruled by the colonial ruler and only because of the increasing pressure of West and America, the developing nations i.e. the members of the Organization of American States or the Organization of American Unity, acknowledged and included the standards of the Universal Declaration in their national constitutions (for detail see, Pollis & Schwab, 1980: 14; Tomuschat, 1981; Kumaraswamy, 1997: 23-25). Second, the ideological views and the values implied in the contained rights of UDHR, has also been questioned. It is said that instead of the dominant ideals of non-western societies, the western ideological outlook has been followed the UDHR (for detail see, Panikkar, 1985: 75). Finally, the charge of giving over emphasis on the individualistic approach has been brought against the founder of UDHR. It is allegedly said that in the UDHR no emphasis of the collective values was set and it only gave importance on the individualistic approach which is apparently not suitable for the socialistic society (Op. cit, 2001: 10).

The World Conference of Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 resolved the question of Universality. As stated by the Final Declaration of that conference, "[a]ll human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated" (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993: Paragraph-5). It also added that "the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind" (Ibid.). The relevance of this addition, which can be seen as a consequence of political compromise, remains an enigma. Given the question of universality of human rights, it can be stated that the prospect and meaning of these 'regional particularities' are rendered very limited and insignificant.

Latter, however, the governments like Indonesia, China and Singapore who mostly have censored the universal nature of human rights have seemingly considered the significance of its universal character. It should be noted, further, in the preamble of Bangkok Declaration it was declared clearly that "stressing the universality, objectivity and non-selectivity of all human rights and the need to avoid the application of double standards in the implementation of human rights and its politicization" (Bangkok Declaration, 1993).

But it is hardly surprising that till the date there has been no universal respect for human rights and the unexpected reality has been demonstrated by the different organs of the UNO and the United States Department of States and in the annual reports of Amnesty International and other human rights organization. Baehr observed, "[i]f there existed universal implementation of human rights, it would be necessary to codify them in international treaties and to design com-

plex supervisory mechanisms" (Op. cit, 2001: 11).

In connection to this, different criteria are to be applied to decide the universality of human rights. A common consensus should be maintained and followed by all human beings of entire World about the acceptable meaning and successful implementation of the human rights. Second, the meaning of the same would also be accepted unanimously by the political elites all over the World. However, the first criterion cannot be reached for the time being and the second would be too difficult to accomplish. For instance, difference between the pronouncements shaped at the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), Vienna, by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Asian States and those of Western Ministers can be mentioned here (Hoof, 1996: 1-15).

Indeed, the universality of human rights was agreed 'universal' at the level of non-governmental organization. "The meeting [of Asian non-governmental organization] resulted in a (non-governmental) Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights, which left no doubt about the universal character of these rights" (Op. cit, 2001: 11).

Universal human rights standards are rooted in many cultures. We affirm the basis of universality of human rights which afford protection to all of humanity, including special groups such as women, children, minorities and indigenous peoples, workers, refugees and displaced persons, the disabled and elderly. While advocating cultural pluralism, those cultural practices which derogate from universally accepted human rights including women's rights, must not be tolerated. As human rights are of universal concern and are universal in value, the advocacy of human rights cannot be considered to be an encroachment upon national sovereignty (Our Voice: Bangkok NGO Declaration on Human Rights, 1993: 199).

About the NGO's stance on the issue of cultural relativism, in the various scholarly writings it was stated that, "[t]hese non-governmental organizations did not hide behind a notion of cultural relativism, defending violations of international human rights standards with an appeal to alleged 'other' culturally determined values. [for an excellent survey of relevant views see, Renteln, 1990; for defense of cultural relativism see, Op. cit, 1980: 1-18; Pollis, 1998: 5-23; for a strong rejection of cultural relativism see, Howard, 1993: 315-38] On the contrary, they demanded that where cultural practices deviate from international human rights standards, the later ought to be previl" (Op. cit, 2001: 12).

Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that the notion of the universality of human rights is admitted or considered by the NGO's at a rather high abstract level. It is true that, still a disagreement about its (universality of human rights) significance has been prevailing inside such organization. For instance, there was lack of adequate concurrence on the issue that whether or not Amnesty International should work for the emancipation of those homosexuals who had been imprisoned for their homosexuality. Though the members of this organization in Western countries expressed their strong favour, many Asian, African and Latin-American sections of this organization did oppose on this issue and this debate was lasted for a long period. The latter saw homosexuality as an illness or deviation and having nothing to do with human rights. They viewed that if Amnesty would take any attempt to release the detainees that would be most ridicule. However, after a long, it was decided that Amnesty would work for the release of such detained persons (Ibid, 1994: 18-19).

However, it has been difficult to answer the question raised by the opponents, that whether or not the promotion and progress of Amnesty International in the Third World countries would have been deprecated for this decision.

### 2.3.1. WESTERN VERSUS NON-WESTERN APPROACH: DONNELLY'S INTERPRETATIONS

Human rights are primarily the rights of individual and no other individual or group can violate these rights— this view was first portrayed in Western tradition to protect the rights of human beings. But in connection to this issue there has been a crucial difference exist between Western and non-Western approach. Expressing their views about human dignity, the modern Western and non-western scholars have emphasized the 'individual' from different aspect. This

difference has been looked after by Jack Donnelly who argued that the traditional non-Western thinking did not support the protection of the individual against the demands of society (Op. cit, 1989: 57). In the second World Conference on Human Rights, Mr. Ali Alatas, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia proposed: "Indonesian culture as well as its ancient well-developed customary laws have traditionally put high priority on the rights and interests of the society or nation, without however in any way minimizing or ignoring the rights and interests of individuals and groups". Mr. Alatas made this argument to search a balance between the rights of the individual and the community.

Though the view of Donnelly was accepted partially, but it does not signify that no true 'universal' norms have been developed in recent times. Moreover, it has been very clear that today the non-Western societies have approved the Western conception of human rights, and vice-versa. Today the Western ideas of human rights protection do not refuse the other universally accepted norms that are adopted and developed by the non-Western societies related to it. For instance it can be observed that though the Western thinkers introduced and developed the idea of international communism but currently the manifestations of communist thinking can only be found (relatively) in Asia, not in Western countries as well.

Today the danger or jeopardy of systemic and gross violations of human rights, such as genocide, torture or involuntary disappearances, have been damning by the all governments nearly, irrespective of their ideological or cultural background. These tendencies indicate that certain human rights have reached the universal acceptance. Besides this inclination "the idea of collective rights is increasingly being accepted in the West as in the East" (Op. cit, 2001: 13-14). Like the right to self determination which was enumerated in ICCPR and ICESCR, the rights of indigenous peoples have also growing attention in Western countries as well (Hunt and Burger, 1994: 405-23; Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 1993: 50-60; see also, Indigenous Peoples, Advisory Report, 1993: No. 16). Furthermore, the non-Western countries have been demanding for recognition of minority rights next to those of members of such minorities as mentioned in Article 27 of ICCPR.

It should be stated further that since 1948 different international conferences such as the World Conference on Human Rights held in Teheran and Vienna in 1968 and 1993, accordingly, have severally concurred the principles of Universal Declaration. It has specifically declared in Vienna Conference on Human Rights that "the universal nature of these human rights and freedoms is beyond question" (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Op. cit.: Paragraph-1.4). All the governments participated in that conference, however, have not fully agreed with this statement. Following this Mr. Alatas expressed himself as follows:

While human rights are indeed universal in character, it is now generally acknowledged that their expression and implementation in the national context should remain the competence and responsibility of each government. This means that the complex variety of problems, of different economic, social and cultural realities, and the unique value systems prevailing in each country should be taken into consideration. This national competence not only derives from the principles of sovereignty of states, but also is a logical consequence of the principles of self-determination.

Finally, the Bangkok Declaration, 1993 "emphasizes that ratification of international human rights instruments, particularly the ICCPR and ICESCR, should be further encouraged" (Op. cit, 2001: 15). However the emphasis on food rather freedom and duty rather rights were accorded more importance in the South-East (for detail see, Ibid: 15-18).

### 3. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said undoubtedly that, in accordance with its different political and cultural perspectives the idea of human rights has been deciphered differently. But the universal approval or acquiescence of international human rights standards is not to be excluded. Because today all the governments, irrespective of their political ideologies and socio-economic conditions, have been persevering themselves to be civilized and decent. They have been striving to found themselves on the standards that were accepted internationally. In the pretext of respecting various cultural ethos and values,

governments often allow human rights in a given state in a given time to be violated, which should be stopped at the earliest. It has sparked-off the international dispute regarding the way in which the ethos and values, on which international declaration and treaties are based, can be put into practice. To use the words of International Governmental Declaration of Bangkok, "the respect and promotion of human rights should be encouraged by co-operation and consensus and not through confrontation and imposition of incompatible values" (Our Voice: Bangkok NGO Declaration on Human Rights, 1993: 243). In most society's slavery, torture, racial discrimination etc. were taken for granted without any objection even in the recent past. However, these practices are nowadays looked upon as violations of human rights and in a likely way universally prohibited. So it can be said that those attempts to attain such agreement of all in opinion have no doubt shaped a new environment where the human rights can be protected and enjoyed universally.

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