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ENGAGED LITERATURE AND THE NARRATIVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

KEY WORDS:

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Literature is the foundation of Humanity's culture, beliefs and traditions. The affiliation between literature and society is based on the cultural ties. Literature is a reflection of the society, its virtues and the vices. In its corrective measure, literature also mirrors the evils of the society with a view to making the society realize its mistakes and make amends. Literature, as an imitation of human action often depicts what people think, say and do in the society. The narratives are designed to portray human life and action through some characters who by virtue of their action convey universal truths for the purpose of education, information and entertainment. Every work of literature is replete with societal issues and engages itself in contemporary consciousness. The humanitarian concerns of writers led to the emergence of Human rights literature, which is a literary genre that deals with human rights issues, and through rich narratives promotes values of human rights.

Literature has always been more than just a form of entertainment or artistic expression. It is a mirror reflecting the complexities of human experience, a catalyst for change and a tool for challenging the status quo. The human rights literature amalgamates the dynamics of literary narratives with an impetus for the protection of human rights. The present article proposes to study the concept of Engaged Literature which was articulated by the French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, a French Philosopher and also considered as a leading figure in 20th century French philosophy and Marxism.

Engaged Literature is a literature with purpose, as it actively engages in social, political and cultural discourse with a commitment to address the pressing issues, amplifying marginalized voices, and inspiring the readers to think critically about the world about them. Engaged literature is rooted in the idea that writers and artists have a responsibility to engage with the world and depict social concerns as creative writers. A writer of Engaged Literature seeks to intervene in the real-world struggles and does not remain content. A key figure in the philosophy he is canonized as one of the main contributors of existentialism along with Heidegger and Camus. He invigorated the idea of the artist's serious responsibility towards society. Sartre advocated a form of literature that will be a work of great artistic strength and will serve as a historical witness and outlive future generations. He believed that a writer cannot escape his time and he is situated in his time, therefore it is desirable for him to embrace it firmly. The committed writers of engaged literature try to maneuver the indispensable role of Literature in protecting Human rights literature, which is committed to society and believes that each one of us has a moral duty and power to make a social change. It is based on the belief of the enormous power of literature to make a change, and in the responsibility of the author towards the readers both on the social aspect and the artistic one.

Committed Literature or Litterateur engage, which is a French phrase that translates to 'engaged literature', refers to the literature committed to defend or assert an ethical, political, social, ideological or religious view. It generally refers to Literature that is deliberately written to promote a social, political, or moral cause. Also known as engaged literature, it gained popularity within the fifties as it aligns with the strong

political movements of that time. In June 1947 Taha Hussein, a renowned Egyptian writer, literary critic and an intellectual often referred to as the "Dean of Arabic Literature", used the term for the first time and played a crucial role in advocating for education, secularism, and social reform in the Arab world. He used it in the context of literature's role in addressing social, political, and cultural issues, emphasizing that writers should not be detached from their societies but should actively participate in shaping public consciousness.

The idea bring into line the philosophy later popularized by the existentialist writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, who formally introduced the concept of "Litterature Engagee" in his essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature ? (What is Literature?)* published in 1947. He explored and interpreted the definition in his work what is Literature. The Committed writers know that words are action. "He knows that to reveal is to change and one can reveal only by planning to change."

Sartre has observed that Committed Literature is engaged with human freedom, because the writer deals with meanings. Literature appeals to human freedom by revealing a world to us. Consequently "Litterature engage" (Engaged Literature) or the literature of commitment evolved in the immediate post-World War II era that extends into the late 20th century. The idea is an application to art of a basic existentialist philosophical concept of the French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre who revived the idea of the artist's serious responsibility to society. A close connection was also established between the engaged literature and the concept of human rights literature which was first articulated in the foreword to 'Freedom' an anthology of short stories by renowned authors from around the world published in Britain in 2010 by Mainstream Publishing in collaboration with the human rights organization Amnesty International. The stories were written in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which aims to throw some light on various human rights issues. The foreword titled - "The Tremendous Power of Literature", by Vered Cohen Barzilay, discusses the relationship between the Italian novella "Prima di Lasciarsi" by Gabriella Ambrosio (English: "Before We Say Goodbye" and human rights. In her foreword, Cohen discusses the profound impact literature can have in promoting human rights and inspiring social change. She also emphasizes that literature possesses a unique ability to touch hearts and minds, engaging people in ways that differ from political or academic texts. This engagement can lead to personal or societal transformation, making literature a powerful tool in educating and advocating human rights. The foreword along with the book was translated into various languages and published around the world in many countries including UK, US, Canada, Poland, Spain, Latin America, and Italy.

In 2010 at the Edinburgh Book festival the preliminary concept of Engaged Literature was first introduced in public discussion, and in March 2012 it was formally introduced by Cohen-Barzilay at Oxford University UK, at a panel discussion held under the title "The Power of Literature and Human Rights" and in early 2013 at the Literary Festival at the London School of Economics. In 2012, Cohen-Barzilay founded Novel Rights e-publishing specializing in creating and promoting Human Rights Literature. Thus began a journey where the power of literature and the pursuit of human rights converged, highlighting their intertwined role in shaping society and advocating for justice.

Human rights literature based on the idea of "engaged literature", formulated by Sartre argued that intellectuals and the ordinary citizens must take a stand, especially in regard to major political conflicts. He also argued that literature must be a form of political and moral engagement demanding writers to take responsibility for their role in shaping societal consciousness. Sartre hoped that literature would serve as a means to enable oppressed minority groups gain recognition and that members of the elites would be moved to action as a result of the influence of literature. He argued that a work of literature has to consciously address groups that have the power to act. Sartre offers a double function for literature, acting both as a mirror for the oppressor and also as a source of inspiration and guidance for the oppressed. Various actions should be chosen according to their contribution to the realization of a socialist democracy, but the author must not decide according to dogma. As a moral concept, human rights literature deals directly or indirectly with human rights and leads its readers to understand and act to protect human rights. The literary products are accompanied by general information concerning human rights and organizations, as well as suggestions for direct action that go hand in hand with subjects that arise from the literature. Sartre argued in "What is Literature?"

"The reader of the novel submits to the book before him; he plays, he consents to play; the world of the work becomes his world, which he projects before him without defending himself, without regretting it, and asking questions....."

He lives the problem which he himself helps to create, placing himself in the most sympathetic position in relation to what the writer wishes to say". Marina Nemat, author of *Prisoner of Tehran* and the winner of the first European Parliament 'Human Dignity' award, explicates that "Literature allows the victim to become a survivor and stand up to the past to ensure a better future. It is literature that carries the human experience, reaches our hearts, and makes us feel the pain of those who have been treated unjustly. Without literature and the narrative that involves human issues, we would lose our identity as human beings and will dissolve in the darkness of time and our repeated mistakes that lead us from one preventable devastation to the next". (Nemat)

George Orwell's 1984 and *Animal Farm* is a classic example of Engaged Literature which critiques , totalitarianism, propaganda, and political oppression. It is powerful work that seeks to warn and engage public. Orwell believed that writers should speak out against injustices and uses storytelling as a genre to challenge political authority and encourage the readers to think critically about the ideologies. Henceforth, human rights literature emphasizes the responsibility of the author to delve into writings that is not deliberately isolated from the world and geopolitical events, and is also concerned with the regional and global social crises. Human rights literature does not even believe in writing for purely artistic aesthetic purposes. It demands the writers to use their moral-societal obligations as the power of the literary creation on the public is enormous and rarely comes to execution.

American philosopher professor Martha Nussbaum in her book *Poetic Justice*, argues that social sympathy is a necessary condition for unbiased treatment in courts of law. Nussbaum has observed that Judges are short of imaginative data about the persons they must judge, and literary works can be adopted and pursued for direction. Another author Richard Rorty wrote that "human rights culture", is a term borrowed from the Argentinian jurist and philosopher Eduardo Rabossi. In an article called "Human Rights Naturalized", Rabossi argues that philosophers should think of this culture as a new, welcome fact of the post-Holocaust world, they should stop trying to get behind or beneath this fact.

Vered Cohen Barzilay writes in the foreword to her essay "The Tremendous Power of Literature":-
"Literature can be as powerful as life itself. It can be like our prophecy. It 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, as well as all humanity. We just need to keep on reading and to allow the tremendous power of literature to enter our hearts and lead us to our own path."

She emphasized the role of literature in advocating social justice and human rights. Besides emphasizing the emotional and transformative power of literature she also reflects the dehumanization and polarization in conflict zones, especially in the Israeli and Palestinian context. Reading Gabiella Ambrosio's *Before We Say Goodbye*, which humanized both a Palestinian suicide bomber and her Israeli victim made her realize how stories could cut through ideological barriers and speak about our shared human experience. She argues that literature helps the readers to see the full humanity of others, especially those who are marginalized.

Indeed, Human Rights Literature does not impose on the authors actual call for action, rather, the writer's task ends as soon as he completes the writing process. Only the readers' response can answer whether the creation inspires social change or motivates for action. Books become the agents of change with a potential to awaken moral responsibility, provoke questions, and inspire change.

This aligns with the goals of human rights activism that is to raise awareness and provoke action against injustice. Human rights literature provides the readers with an opportunity for a direct action, however it is not a compulsory requirement. In fact, the commitment is an unwritten accord between the readers and the literary creation developed through the reading process, which holds simultaneously the freedom to refrain from action.

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