

City of literature: understanding united nation's goals for sustainable development

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Abstract

Balancing population growth and judicious use of resources paved the way to understand, not only the need of human species safe existence for coming generations but also the secured existence of the environment rather than Planet. United Nations 17 Goals of Sustainable Development are set to recover the planet 'More Green', with more 'Inclusive Economies', and more 'Resilient Societies'. More Green objective indicates alarming 'Global Warming', Inclusive Economies reflects empathetic approach towards 'Eradicating Poverty', and Resilient Society has enclosed concept of 'Secured Future for Coming Generations'. To comprehend concisely the multi dimensional concept of Sustainable Development, globally writers are contributing through novels, short stories and articles. Real life stories roaming and interconnecting around global warming, poverty and safe future for coming generations have been framed in fictional writings. UNESCO's 'Cities of Literature' program has selected and recommended fictional writings for better understanding of 17 goals set by the UN to achieve sustainable development. 1.'The Conditions of the Working Class in England' by Friedrich Engels on Poverty, 2.'Independent People' by Halldor Laxness on hunger, 3.'A Fist or a Heart' by Kristin Eiriksdottir on Good health and well being, 4.'Taking up Space' by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbibi on Quality Education, 5. 'Admissions' by Mira Harrison on Economic Growth, 6. 'Scavengers' by Darren Simpson on Sustainable cities, 7. 'The Trespassers' by Meg Mundell on Life below Water, are the recommended literature by Cities of Literature. Real life fictional writings will help in understanding more deeply the concept of sustainable development and to connect individuals at global level.

Keywords: - Sustainable Development, United Nations, 'City of Literature' program, Fictional Literature.

Introduction

Post Industrial societies have evolved with multi-faceted human capacities, specifically economic standards, social structures and attitudes with the ultimate goal to reduce human discriminations, inequalities and eradicate poverty. Societal evolution incorporates the human relations with resources which have been checked in terms of judicious distribution of resources among global human kind by maintaining traditions on one hand and adopting modern technologies on the other. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during Corona pandemic opines, "We need to turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future". According to Reyes G.E., as cited by Justice Mensah & Sandra Ricart Casadevall 'Development is understood as a social condition within a nation, in which the needs of its population are satisfied by the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and systems'. Development can be witnessed as the differentiation between traditional society which is resisting modernization, and modern society, which adapts inclusive economy and technology at faster rate. As cited by Justice Mensah & Sandra Ricart Casadevall, Tipps advocated that 'Traditional societies are entangled by norms, beliefs and values, which are hampering their development'. Sustainable Development in inclusive process of Economy and Environment. According to Stoddart 'The conceptualisation of sustainable development that has emerged is one of development that addresses three pillars- economic, social and environmental- and the interlinkages between them. Progress within and across all three pillars in a consolidated manner is seen as critical in the achievement of truly sustainable development.' The most admired, accepted and widely used thought regarding sustainable development is given in Brundtland Report 1987 [4] 'Our Common Future'. It states, 'Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

The United Nations General Assembly set sustainable development goals in 2015 and intended to be achieved by 2030, comprises 17 global goals, as a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" [5]. To make the concept more comprehend, and to connect individuals to global level, institutions like education, administration work accordingly. Literature world has also responsibility to carry thoughts and principles through novels, stories and poems. To make available the suitable literature for comprehension, UNESCO carries the program of 'City of Literature', launched in 2004 [6]. Cities with Seven creative fields are selected every five years to promote literature and creativity, like crafts, Folk art, Film, Media Arts and Music. For better understanding of sustainable development goals, The United Nations under Programme, 'City of Literature', selected real life stories which address themes like poverty, hunger. Gender, Inclusive society, economy and development. Under this program, UNESCO recommends powerful and soul-searching literature. It includes- 'The Conditions of Working Class' by Friedrich Engels, 'Independent People' by Nobel laureate Halldor Laxness, 'A Fist or a Heart' by Kristin Eiriksdottir, 'Taking up Space' by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi, 'Admission' by Mira Harrison, 'Scavengers' by Darren Simpson, and 'The Trespassers' by Meg Mundell.

1. 'The Conditions of Working Class' by Friedrich Engels:

United Nations 11th goal states, "Make Cities and Human Settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Post Industrial period has witnessed the supply of cheap labor from the countryside or rural areas, forced to live in challenging conditions in industrial centers. Life of densely populated inhabitants in city is influenced by capitalists, government policies, inclusive economies, and is identified as, slum dwellers, rural migrants, migrated laborers. Professor Martin Obschonka opined that, 'The Industrial Revolution, which brought together large-scale coal based industries like mining, steel, pottery and textiles, helped create the foundation of modern society and wealth. At the same time, the early industrial economies that formed in this era were also associated with brutal working and living

conditions [7]. UNESCO has recommended reading the fiction, 'The Conditions of Working Class', for better understanding of deteriorating living conditions of industrial workers. Mrs. Florence Kelley has translated this account in English.

The German Philosopher Friedrich Engels, the eldest son of eminent German Textile Industrialist, wrote his first classic account in England, 'Die Lage der Arbeitender Klasse' in German Language, on universal conditions of the industrial working class during 1842-44. Being Radical journalist since his youth, when visited Manchester, the heart of Industrial Revolution, Engels advocated the worst living conditions of industrial workers. He inferred that mortality in industrial centers due to contagious diseases such as, smallpox, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough, was four times higher, and mortality due to convulsions was ten times higher to that of the countryside. He pointed to the higher mortality rate in Manchester and Liverpool to that of the National mortality rate. The mortality rate of below five year aged children and adults were higher in postindustrial period as compared to pre industrial in industrial town of Carlisle. He correlated wages of workers with their living conditions and inferred that their fewer wage as compared to pre industrial society compelled them to live in derogated, unhealthy, unpleasant living conditions. Based on statistical evidence, scientific explanation advocated by Engels, the consequence of industrial revolution, achieved strong place in Marxist philosophy. He shared similar vision with Karl Marx regarding labor and living conditions, and predicted that, working class will bring final revolution in future history. Engels justified how poor and uneducated are exploited by rich. Child labor, low wages, bad living conditions, poor health, death rates, environmental damages in industrial centers were scientifically explained as reflection of social and political power of oppressors in his book. Even after hundred and seventy-five years, the relevance of his classic need to read for understanding the derogated situation of rural migrants, labor migrants, refugees, asylums, during Corona pandemic.

2. Independent People by Nobel laureate Halldor Laxness:

Diffusion of Agricultural innovations and technological impact has developed a contradictory pattern across the globe. Green and associated revolutions have empowered farmers as well generated environmental pollutions on one hand while still in developing countries; crude agricultural practice is the source of livelihood for the rural and nomadic life. International Relations Scholar, Foley Michael opined that, "Resilient farmers know the difference between short term profitability and long-term economic sustainability." {8} The United Nations has put the goal of 'End Hunger, achieving food security, and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture' at second rank. Struggle of poor Icelandic farmers, surviving in isolated inhospitable landscape, has portrayed in epic novel, 'Independent People', written by 1955 Nobel Prize secured in Literature, Halldor Laxness. Published in two volumes in 1934 and 1935, the novel is considered as foremost examples of social realism.

Bjartur, an ordinary sheep farmer, in Iceland, desperately wanted to get rid from slavery, after spending eighteen years in state of being slave and suppressing pride, desire to have his own flocks of sheep, and determine to acquire independence. To achieve liberated and self-owned life, he compelled his family to work hard beyond capacity, in Iceland with rugged landscape, glaciers, newly formed lava fields, which make him more ruthless with his family to achieve his goals. Independence in his terms is economic emancipation by owning a farmstead and a flock of sheep but denying independence to wife. He had deep faith in sheep indicates connection between nature and man for achieving his independence and prosperity. Struggle with nature and slavery made him disbeliever in the God, created haters towards politics and Bailiffs, at the same time he was adamant to introduction of modernization of agriculture in Iceland. Laxness slowly unfold the psyche of Bjartur, as, his daughter wanted to get independent from him. The will power struggle made his inner self to explore. Bjartur character is portrayed as the struggle for independence not from his outer world, but it is with his inner self.

Accepting that he loves his family, and he has pain deep inside him, were revelations within himself. This exploration made him independent in real terms, justifying the concept of independence is illusion or stubbornness. Laxness, a socialist, through this novel justified the emergence of politics of Iceland after world war II. Portraying Icelandic ideology of independence, Laxness was criticized as communist; therefore, despite of Nobel award, his novel was banned in United States.

3. A Fist or a Heart by Kristin Eiríksdóttir:

'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', is the third goal set by the United Nations for sustainable development. Wellbeing is the state of mind to feel happy, healthy, socially connected and purposeful by managing stress. Wellbeing is emotional, physical, social, workplace and societal. Life experiences may create hurdles in generating good emotions and feelings, which may barrier in developing meaningful relations, and overcome loneliness. Wellbeing is declining in modern society, which is of concern. According to Deci and Ryan cited by Helen R. Winefield and others, 'Psychological well - being is usually conceptualized as some combinations of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (the eudaimonic perspective).'{9} UNESCO recommend the psychological fiction, 'A Fist or Heart', written by Kristin Eiríksdóttir to understand the wellbeing of woman. Kristin is an Icelandic poet and author, winner of Icelandic Literary Prize, as well Icelandic Women's Literature Prize 2017, for her English Language debut.

A Fist or A Heart (such as they are) novel is a deep perceptive psychological account of two unconventional characters. Elin lives an isolated life making props for theaters. She had a difficult childhood and consequently could not develop social wellbeing. Ellen, is the illegitimate daughter of dead known playwright and author. Elin and Ellen, both have similarities regarding difficult childhood, trauma, and express their inner truths through creative expressions. Elin, in her late sixties, found maternal feelings coming over surface for Ellen, who is in her twenties. More Elin attempts to

connect with Ellen, the more she encounters her painful memories, more she finds it difficult in connecting with reality. The story is mirroring of Elin and Ellen, with sorrows and strengths.

Woman carries along with her the memories of pains and humiliation of childhood, which do not allow her to establish emotional and social wellbeing. Such lives must be identified and offer humanistic behavior. By taking cognizance of child abuse or harsh childhood and its impact on adult life, childhood need to be protected.

4. Taking up Space by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbibi:

During an interview with Anita Sethi, for The Guardian, Chelsea expressed, "I know that my race and gender disadvantage me before I even open my mouth". Chelsea and Ore, Cambridge graduates had different experiences of University because of their race and gender. Despite the inclusive approach of University, the education system is dominated by white, male and upper class. 'Taking up Space: The Black Girl's Manifesto for Change', explores lack of diversity in education, curriculums, mental health, relationships, and activism at University. Expressing the hurdles of racism and gender while pursuing education, this non-fiction has become an essential guide to university for women of color, because they have detailed their struggle of being minority in predominantly white university, exploring their mental health, fitting in and relationships on campus. In first year, a few boys asked her if they could touch and smell her hair, Ore, which severely hindered her confidence. Linda Darling - Hammond, Professor Emerita, Stanford University, quotes, 'E.B. DuBois was right about the problem of the 21st century. The color line divides us still. In recent years, the most visible evidence of this in the public policy arena has been the persistent attack on affirmative action in higher education and employment'.{10}

United Nations 4th goal, 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. This goal itself indicates that in educational institutions the race, class, colour and

region, factors put them far behind to their mission. This fact has been narrated by Chelesa and Ore, while pursuing their education at Cambridge. Chelesa compels to introspect by asking, 'what is meant by space? - Who is space initially reserved for? Who has the ability to freely occupy space? It's about taking up space unapologetically and saying you deserve to be in that space'. Race, colour, region, caste, religion have created space in most rational organizations like universities, which need to check, to ensure that quality education must be accessed by all. Institutional discrimination in space of liberalism has narrated in this account, which is introspective and eye opening to education system.

5. Admissions by Mira Harrison:

Eight women, who have dedicated their lives to caring professions - doctors, nurses, cooks and cleaners, share the experiences, are assembled in the form of short stories in 'Admission', the fictional tales, which express the experiences of professional women while tackling and balancing professional life and home life. Every story directly communicates with the reader, creating a distinct character in each narrative. Instead of getting sentimental, each story reflects strong emotions and life changing events of the characters. Slowly narrating the national health system through stories is incredible. Harrison has effectively portrayed the complex life of health workers roaming around demands of the hospital system, personnel life and world around her. Healthy working environment facilitates the working capacity of employees, which in turn contributes in managing personal and professional life as well as accelerating economic growth.

8th Goal of the United Nations is to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. City of Literature program recommend, 'Admission', a fictional account by Mira Harrison, doctor turned writer, who has contributed as professional expertise in hospitals, universities and government agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand and Britain for almost 30 years - in clinical obstetrics and gynecology.

'Admission', portrays women not only as professional skillful individuals working at hospitals, but also her emotions and relationships within hospitals, making the health system communicative and interpersonal. Health system as a complex organism which needs decision making power in realities between birth and death is taken as a challenge and handled by women doctors, nurses, cooks and cleaners as skillful individuals. Whereas, they manage home life as the mother, sister, daughter, which stretches them in between profession and home life. Mira opines, "We plan and predict, but we stumble and fall. Our careful- or haphazard!- strategies are disrupted by falling in love, by our connections to others, by the birth of our children, by living our ordinary lives, by our deepest - or most impulsive! - feelings, by love and loss and grief, and of course ultimately by death". 'Admission', reflects the role of skillful women as a health care expert, with her balancing her own inner and outer world, and her need in the global health care system.

6. Scavengers by Darren Simpson:

Scavengers, A Guardian Best Book of 2019, Selected for the National 2019 Summer Reading Challenge, Shortlisted for the 2020 Northern Ireland Book Award, An Observer Older Children Book of the Month, recommended by UNESCO as a book under City of Literature Program, written by Darren Simpson, writes fiction for children. Young Landfill lived as a scavenger and old Bagaboo looked after him by laying conditions, are the two characters. Landfill is a feral child living with Babagoo, an old man, living in the hinterland of the city. Babagoo provides protection to him by controlling his movement. Landfill was not allowed to look outside and rise above the wall of the hinterland. Landfill, being an adventurous and curious character, always does the things which Babagoo does not ask him to do. Against all restrictions, Landfill encounters adolescent age, full of questions and experimentations. The story slowly unfolds which makes him self-reliant and independent. Stefanos Mastrotheodoros, a developmental Psychologist cited Mund's opinion on adolescents and parents relations, 'People's personality affects the quality of their interpersonal relationships, as well their perception and interpretation of these

relationships, it is expected that personality is related to parent- adolescent conflict intensity'.[11] The story compels to introspect what is relationship means? What is meant by human beings? What is civilized life? And where does happiness and safety remain? What is right and wrong? What is the relationship between the environment and humans? The Scavengers theme helps in exploring the theme of sustainability, real world, and environment outside of the real world, which the United Nations set for the world to understand.

7. The Trespassers by Meg Mundel:

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is one of the goals of the United Nations. Inclusive societies and justice is offered to authentic citizens of any country. Where do the migrants, refugees and asylums stand? Who will offer justice to them? Will they be a part of inclusive societies? Rohingyas, migrant laborers, rural migrants during pandemic have raised the question asking for their existence. According to Dr. Sharif Haider, the Social Worker, 'NGOs and Aid agencies estimated that most common mental health conditions amongst the Rohingya people are post- traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety disorder. The International Crisis Group state that the Rohingya People the most ill treated and persecuted minority ethnic group in the world'.[12]

'The Trespassers', by Meg Mundell is a Melbourne - based novelist, journalist and social researcher, is based on true story of the Ticonderoga- a 'fever ship' full of migrant workers started journey from UK, towards Melbourne Australia in search of better life, in 1852, sparking the creation of Australia's first quarantine station. Even though this event is 200 years old, it finds its relevance still in today's context. Steadfast is the ship, taking migrants escaping economic hardship, spreading pandemics and climatic hazards, their journey becomes threatening for their survival. All migrants were physically and medically checked if they had viral infection. With confirmation of health, they are allowed to board. Main characters, Cleary, the deaf Irish boy,

travelling with his mother, who desires to provide a better life to her son, Billie, carrying guilt from her earlier life, and Tom, the teacher in search of a better job are portrayed with their vulnerability, strength to fight, and humanitarian approach towards life.

As ship proceeds, death of crew members and spread of disease, the situation on the ship becomes complex. From this situation parallel stories of pain and heart wrenching thrill of migrants with a label of refugees on off shore of Australia, their attempt to enter Australia, being imprisoned and detained by the political system, indicates how, the migrant hater- nationalism is threatening global humanitarian values.

Conclusion

Connecting Global to local or individual has become needed to bring the human species in one stream of flow. Even though variation exist regarding dimensions of human being's life across the globe, to bring inclusive growth and sustainable existence in future, including natural and manmade physical world, the print structured by the United Nations has to be made permeable up to the ground level. The Literature highlights major issues of the world through novels, fictions, short stories and articles. UNESCO's City of Literature Program offers the best seven fictions to comprehend sustainable development programs set by the United Nations .

'The Conditions of Working Class' by Friedrich Engels, put light on stressful life and living conditions of workers in cities. Post Industrial period planning yet could not bridge gap between poor labor and rich capitalists. 'Independent People' by Nobel laureate Halldor Laxness, is eye opening to the meaning of Independence from sustainable meaning point of view. Is it only economic, political or self soul releasing from rigidity. 'A Fist or a Heart' by Kristin Eiriksdottir, is very powerful and terrifying fiction, sketching psychological barriers and searching meaning of life in existing world by women who have painful childhood. This account indicates need of changing attitude

towards single lonely women. 'Taking up Space' by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi, is intellectual account to mark race, caste and religious impact on most rational and logical sector, that is, Education. Human species yet haven't succeeded in breaking these barriers. 'Admission' by Mira Harrison, is a mirroring woman balancing her work, home, surrounding and her personal life moreover managing the work environment more efficiently by contributing to the economy. 'Scavengers' by Darren Simpson, sketches the relationship dimensions of parasitic type in cities in search of happiness and self development. 'The Trespassers' by Meg Mundell, compels nations to introspect the concept of Nationalism vs Refugees. The countries need to come closer at political and economic standards for giving refugees and asylums at least a human life.

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