Chapter: 7

Summary and Conclusion

Though human rights have been historically conditioned in Western countries but many factors like varied socio-economic and political context, different philosophical schools, varied cultural perspectives and existential needs of the different societies have been instrumental in the formation of the ‘International Human Rights Corpus’. Therefore, it is erroneous to locate any single source for origin and development of human rights. Consequently, to ground human rights on any single philosophical system nullifies the purpose for which it is designed. The best foundation for human rights corpus lies in its ability to address existential needs of humankind and minimize human suffering induced by barbaric acts of human rights violation as explained in the preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.\(^1\) However, each society can provide its cultural, religious, or ideological foundation for legitimacy and mobilization of human rights.

Human rights are the product of a long struggle for centuries and are designed to minimize the suffering of humankind and promote decent living standards in the world. Therefore, as observed in the first chapter, Jack Donnelly rightly points out that, culture is no great problem for

\(^1\) See Appendix A, for full document of ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.
implementation and acceptance of human rights. Similarly, Abdullahi rightly mentioned that, there is a need to bridge the gap between culture and international corpus of human rights by selecting cultural values, which are nearest to the standards of human rights, thus creating cultural legitimacy for human rights. Therefore, space can be created for cultural values to play an important role in interpreting and implementing the human rights within the broader framework of ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.

Human rights have existential roots in all the cultures around the world, and this makes human rights a universal phenomenon. Rights encapsulated in international human rights corpus are the product of historical struggle and have originated out of human suffering, therefore a precious asset to humankind. The Vienna Declaration, adopted in the year 1993 CE, re-affirmed the international corpus of human rights without a single dissenting vote; this demonstrates the existential need of human rights and its validity all over the world. The ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ has traversed successfully for sixty years, transforming societies, influencing judiciary, and legal systems all over the world.

Half of the world’s population is controlled by repressive authoritarian regimes. These regimes run the State with terror and violence, curtailing all the basic rights of the citizens, with consequent human rights violations. These regimes conduct pseudo elections, with
undemocratic means to project themselves as free countries and respected members of the United Nations, while continuing onslaught on human rights of their citizens. Authoritarian regimes are often accountable to none and exploit the resources of the country for the advantage of the few elites. Often many of these countries become fertile ground for growth of local and international terrorism. The internal conflict within the authoritarian regimes has produced huge refugee population. The ethnic discrimination and inter-state conflicts of authoritarian regimes created millions of internally displaced people and mass exodus of refugees. On the other hand, the refugees in the host nations are considered as burden and are deprived of basic human rights even after decades of residence in host nations. They are often cramped in densely populated camps with lack of nutrition and medical care.

In addition, it is observed that, the socially constructed ‘Race’ has become an ideological tool to rationalize the inequalities in the societies. The ‘Race’ has hypothetically divided the human species, and has become one of the causes for war, and consequent massacre of millions, and uprooted people from their land and made them refugees. ‘Race’ operating subtly through the structures of the society, deprives certain groups of the societies from enjoying the socio-economic and political privileges. Racism based on religion, culture, ethnicity, gave birth to many ideologies on which terrorist organizations were formed.
International and local terrorism has dampened economic activities across the globe especially in developing nations, pushing people out of jobs, and leading to poverty.

Similarly, in Indian context, human rights of vulnerable sections of the society like woman, children, minorities, and workers in organized sectors are impinged. After six decades of independence, only small percentage of scheduled castes and tribes are benefited by various government schemes and constitutional provisions. Majority of scheduled caste and tribal population continue to face the brunt of human rights violations. The Scheduled Castes are one of the most deprived communities of the society. The human rights of the Scheduled Castes are violated in every aspect of life; their right to life, liberty and security are consistently impinged upon by the frequent violent episodes. Scheduled Castes, deprived of their property are forced to become landless laborers and bonded laborers.

It is observed that majority of landless laborers and bonded labourers in India are from scheduled castes, these laborers are deprived of all the privileges entitled to the workers in the Indian law and international corpus of human rights. The plight of the Scheduled Caste bonded laborers is almost equivalent to slavery, which is an impingement of rights mentioned in ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. The
laws to protect the Scheduled Castes are not materialized due to failure of law enforcing agencies.

Along with the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes also suffer dehumanizing environment created by various oppressive forces. Episodes of criminal acts on tribals are frequent and regular, but majority of the culprits go scot-free. Tribals are victims of rape, murder and harassment by security forces, militants, Maoists and non-tribal population. Thus, tribals are denied of their fundamental rights to life, liberty and security as guaranteed in Indian constitution and ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.

The Tribals also suffer forced displacement from their traditional habitats for various governmental and business projects, and seldom properly compensated. The political and corporate nexus driven by demand for land and other resources makes the government to displace tribals from their land. All the constitutional provisions and legal measures designed to protect tribals are seldom implemented. Therefore, tribals are deprived of their rights to property and livelihood. The intense and wide spread human rights violation in Indian context necessitates continued efforts to educate and implement concerns expressed in ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.

The preamble of the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, explicitly underlines the moral value; all human beings bestowed with
equal inalienable inherent dignity, and this moral principle guides the entire corpus of ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. Human rights are grounded on the premise; equal inalienable inherent dignity of all human beings.

‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ states that all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience, thus, responsible to one another as members of one family of humankind. Therefore, all human beings are responsible to one another, as family members. The equality of all human beings is further reinforced in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ which explicitly states that all human beings irrespective of different backgrounds are bestowed with all the human rights encapsulated in it. ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ intend to safeguard not only the survival of human life, but protecting human life with fullness; a life of dignity, freedom and without fear of dehumanization.

The ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ emphasize that, all human beings as an individuals have right to recognition before law, with equal protection of law without any discrimination, to have effective remedy in the court of law, and presumed to be innocent until proved guilty. In addition, article twelve emphasize protection of law against arbitrary interference in anyone’s privacy, family, home, and assault on one’s honour and reputation.
‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ states that, all men and women of full age have right to marry and establish family, which is considered as fundamental unit of society, thus need to be protected by society and state. Further it states that, everyone has right to own property, and cannot be arbitrarily deprived of property.

In addition ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ intends provide social security to everyone, safeguarding the socio-economic and cultural rights of every member of the society, so that no one will deprived of human dignity and development of personality. Similarly, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, aims at providing everyone with livelihood, by ensuring employment in conducive atmosphere and with fair wages without any discrimination. Consequently, everyone along with his or her family can live a life worth of human dignity, and with social protection.

The social and ethical values observed in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ are echoed in the ethical discourse of the Bible. As it is noticed in the fourth chapter, the Pentateuch, which is considered as early Jewish literature, comprising first five books of Old Testament, lays an ethical framework for human transactions and relationships, based on the belief that all human beings are made in the image of God. Therefore all human beings are bestowed with equal honor and divine dignity. It is also observed that, human beings in the
image and likeness of God refers to the fact that, they are endowed with reason to make self critical and responsible decisions. Moreover, it can be inferred that human beings are one family since they are created by one God. Therefore, any kind of discrimination based on socio-economic and political criteria is considered as an assault on God. In this context, Pentateuch lays a significant emphasis on the welfare of whole community along with the individual welfare.

The slavery in general involves dehumanizing practices. Nevertheless, legal codes of Pentateuch allowed slavery for economic necessities of a person with restrictions imposed on the owners of the slave. However, it has to be underlined that one cannot be in permanent state of slavery, because legal codes of Pentateuch mandated the release of a slave after six years, without any obligations. In addition, a slave cannot be tortured or killed by master. Slave was entitled along with the general population, for rest and leisure once a week on Sabbath day. The slaves should be treated with dignity and as family member because slave is a human being made in the image of God bestowed with divine dignity. Therefore, it can be inferred that slave according to Pentateuch, is a worker in contract who entered the contract for economic necessities, generally due to unforeseen economic debacle. However, such a worker in contract is provided with enough of economic security and dignity of life.
The rationale for protecting human life is that all humans are created in the image of God, and bestowed with dignity and sanctity. Therefore, human life is considered as precious and immensely valuable. Unlike other ancient Near Eastern legal codes, no ransom could be accepted for the crime of intentional murder; instead, the person convicted of murder had to face death.

Pentateuch also addresses the issue of physical injuries, and stipulates stringent laws, it prescribes ‘tooth for tooth, eye for any eye’, referring to appropriate compensation for the damages. It is the responsibility of the aggressor to see that the injured person is fully recovered and all the medical expenses and economic needs of an injured person are met.

Property was considered as a source of livelihood. Therefore, laws were stipulated to protect one’s property. Any kind of exploitation, which seeks to rob other’s property, attracted a severe restitution. Even careless or negligent actions of individuals causing damages to someone’s property attracted a severe penalty. The Eighth and Tenth commandments in the Decalogue prohibit stealing and coveting other’s property respectively. Stealing involved all kinds of deceptions and subtle manipulations. Coveting property, generally led to forcible acquisition of property by the powerful by oppressing the poor and the weak.
The vulnerable sections of the society like widows, children, foreigners domiciled in the land and poor were an object of special concern in the legal codes of Pentateuch. These groups were in need of special provision because they were vulnerable to exploitation. As these groups generally did not own property that was the source of livelihood. In such context, the Bible makes a legal provision to ensure that these groups are not exploited economically, and are provided with the basic needs. Various laws are stipulated to ensure that the vulnerable sections of the society benefit from harvest of the land, even though they do not own the land. Above all, the Bible ensures that these groups participate and enjoy in the cultural celebrations. In addition, all the debts were to be cancelled on the seventh year, thus there would be no exploitation in the name of debt. These provisions of the Bible aim at providing social security to the vulnerable sections of the society.

Judiciary is vulnerable to be marred by false evidences, bribery, and influence of the powerful to pervert the justice of the week, leading to judgments with biases and partiality. Therefore, the Bible formulates different laws to address the above-mentioned evils that influence judicial process. Consequently, legal codes of the Bible stipulate laws against false witness, bribery in judicial proceedings. The Bible mandates judges to treat all human beings equal while administering justice. Even in the execution of punishment, the Bible aim at ensuring that, no convict will
be tortured or inhumanly treated. For, there is always a tendency of unduly torturing the culprit in the name of justice or judicial procedures. The Bible considers the accused as innocent until his or her guilt is proven in the court, until that period it makes the provision of providing asylum.

Family is considered as a fundamental unit of the society on which the societies and communities are built. Therefore, The Bible lays a significant emphasis on family. In this context, the Decalogue presents two commandments concerned with family. The Fifth and Seventh commandments speak about obedience of children to parents and prohibition of adultery respectively. Pentateuch prohibits adultery, and prescribes capital punishment for the crime, to preserve the family and to stop further disintegration of society.

The ethical implication of the episodes of monarchs- Ahab and David, reveals that any misuse of royal power to oppress the subjects, especially the vulnerable section, is an abomination to Yahweh. Prophet Nathan and Elijah condemned the misdeeds of David and Ahab respectively and foresaw the tragic end of both the kings. The human wrongs committed by David and Ahab have several similarities. Both Ahab and David misused their royal power for their selfish interest at the cost of justice. Although both the kings were supreme judges of the nations, and were responsible to administer justice, they abused justice
and power. David committed sexual violence for utilizing Bathsheba for his lust that ultimately led to the murder of Uriah, and destroyed his family. In addition, along with Uriah, other men have to die who were sent to most dangerous place of battlefield. In other words, David was responsible for mass murder. Similarly, Ahab committed heinous crime by illegally possessing Naboth’s land, by convicting Naboth to death penalty on false charges. Consequently, prophets of Yahweh confronted both the kings and detailed their crime. Both the kings were condemned to loose their kingdom for abuse of power.

The judgment pronounced on both the kings was based on common principle; all human beings are equally precious in the sight of God and laws of God. Any assault on fellow human beings is an assault on God, as both the prophets, Nathan and Elijah stated that kings have committed evil against God. The above mentioned discourse point to the fact that sublime value placed on human life, human family and human well-being. Therefore, it is implied that the law of God intends to protect human life, livelihood and family.

Similarly, prophets- Isaiah and Amos, condemned the abuse of power by monarchs. They condemned the elites of the society who indulged in dispossessing the poor and vulnerable of their property, and consequently pushing the poor into servitude. They condemned the moneylenders and creditors who dehumanized the poor by selling them
into servitude for owing paltry sum equivalent to pair of sandals. Moreover, the above mentioned prophets condemned mercantile class which robbed the poor by deceptive business practices. In addition, prophets demanded fair judicial proceedings, condemned bribery, and false testimony.

Amidst oppression and indulgence in luxury, the ruling class and mercantile class meticulously sacrificed offerings at the altar of *Yahweh* that was condemned by prophets. Prophets reasoned that without righteousness and justice, the sacrifices at the altar are abomination to *Yahweh*, the God of Israel. Therefore, prophets asserted that, justice, righteousness and concern for vulnerable sections of the society are pre-requisite for right relationship with God.

Prophetic judgment, based on the ethical demands of *Yahweh*, expressed in the legal codes of Old Testament, treated all human beings equal in dignity and worth irrespective of socio-economic and political status. Consequently, prophets condemned the imperial powers for abusing the privileges, property and life of their subjects. Prophets valued property as source of livelihood and as a gift of God. The land provided security, dignity and livelihood. In this context, any encroachment of property by powerful was condemned and punished by *Yahweh*. Prophets valued human life and family as precious; any violation of human life and family was severely condemned.
In the similar vein, the book of proverbs intend to instruct and guide the individuals in a wise living conforming to God’s will. Like legal codes of Old Testament, Proverbs treat all human beings as equal with divine dignity. In this context, Proverbs particularly warns against insulting or mocking the poor, as it is equivalent to mocking God. Similarly, Proverbs lay significant emphasis on protecting the well-being of the poor and condemns exploitation and oppression of the poor. In addition, Proverbs warns of God’s punishment on the person who exploits the poor; by dispossessing them from their property, thieving them by unethical business transactions, consequently dehumanizing the poor. Moreover, Proverbs condemn unfair judicial proceeding influenced by bribery, bias, and influence of the powerful, consequently cornering the innocent and poor as victims of injustice, conversely, allowing the culprit to go scot-free. Therefore, Proverbs aim at protecting the justice due to the poor and innocent, and warns against unfair judicial proceeding, especially against the vulnerable sections of the society.

On the other hand, Jesus reverberate the values expressed in the Old Testament. Jesus’ interpretation of Old Testament moves beyond legalism and traditions to meet the demands of God expressed in the mandate; love God and love fellow human beings. Jesus laid tremendous emphasis on sanctity of human life and dignity of human
beings irrespective of socio-economic and political background. For Jesus, the sense of equal sanctity and dignity of all human beings directed his approach to different ethical issues of his time. The message of Jesus prohibits anger, hatred, and revenge, leading to violence between individual and communities. Often harbored grudge and anger reflect in discriminative attitudes and policies, marginalizing fellow human beings.

Underlining the significance of just and peaceful relationship with fellow human beings, Jesus states that one cannot have relationship with God without having a right relationship with fellow human beings, as commandment to love God and to love fellow human beings are intertwined. By this statement, Jesus emphasizes the sanctity and human dignity of all human beings, implying that all human beings belong to one family and are in the image of God. Love for the fellow human beings irrespective of socio-economic and political background is the crux of Jesus’ social ethics, as demonstrated in the parable of Samaritan, who helped and nurtured the half-dead victim of violence.

To restore human dignity and sanctity, Jesus confronted all the human traditions and customs that are used to dehumanize the people. Therefore, Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on Sabbath day. Thus, Jesus restored the man from the bondage and servitude caused by the withered hand. Consequently, giving freedom and dignity to the
person crippled by infirmity. Jesus had much concern for the persons vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as he prohibits lustful look and considers lustful look is equivalent to adultery. Consequently, Jesus seems to safeguard the vulnerable persons from sexual exploitation, and safeguard human family and institution of marriage.

Jesus aimed at human communities free from falsity and lies. He intended to build human society based on integrity and justice. In this context, Jesus prohibits oaths, which are generally used to cover up falsity. Jesus directed that all human transactions either in oath or without oath should be based on truth and integrity. This mandate of Jesus becomes all the more important in judicial proceedings and witness. In other words, Jesus demands justice in all human transactions and relationships.

In the light of sanctity of human life and equal dignity of all human beings, Jesus did not tolerate poverty in the midst of riches. Therefore, Jesus challenged covetousness to amass wealth leaving behind the poor and needy, as reflected in his parable, where a rich farmer amasses wealth in the form of crops without sharing with the needy and hungry, but he dies a premature death leaving all his wealth behind. It has been observed that Jesus directs the rich man to share his wealth with the poor and needy. Consequently, it can be inferred that Jesus mandates for sharing of the resources and wealth so that no human beings lacks in material
goods for decent living worthy of human dignity. Therefore, it can be deduced that Jesus condemns covetousness leading to amassing of wealth by marginalizing and exploiting the poor in economic terms.

Paul expounds the message of love of Jesus, stating the significance of love for God and for fellow humans. In this regard, he points out that all the heroic acts, deed of self-sacrifice and spiritual activities are useless if not laced with love for God and for fellow human beings. He echoes the statement of Jesus that love for God and for fellow human beings fulfills all the demands of Old Testament Law. Paul intends to build human communities based on characteristics of love, where there is no domination, arrogance, and envy, which lead to exploitation and marginalization of the week. However, all members of the society are respected and given full opportunity and develop in different dimensions of life. Moreover, love does not enjoy the wrong but takes pleasure in truth and justice. Therefore, it can be inferred that, stating this characteristic of love, Paul envisions human relationships and societies controlled by justice, transparency and integrity, thus, it can be said that love demands justice in all human transactions, especially in the administration of justice and economic activities. Consequently, Paul prohibits revenge and violence as response to an assault, but recommends a just response aiming towards peace and reconciliation.
The above mentioned discourse on human rights and the Bible demonstrate that the major ethical teachings of the Bible clearly endorse concerns expressed in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, it can be inferred that the adherents of Bible, all over the world, need to participate actively in promoting concerns expressed in ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, in the respective societies, the adherents of the Bible, as individuals and as entities need to move towards materializing the moral standards and concerns expressed in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ for the betterment of humanity. In addition, it is also observed in the present research that there have been massive and intense human rights violation that have already taken place, consequently the psyche of the victims is deeply marred by damages in different arenas of life. In this context, there is a need to do research on Biblical response to human rights violations that have already taken place.