



# PROCEEDINGS



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## PROTECTION & PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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# ***Antigone, the Crusader of Human Rights: A Critical Analysis***

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The horrors of the Second World War, particularly the genocides perpetrated by the Nazi regime were instrumental in scripting the Universal Declaration of Human rights on December 10, 1948. Representatives of 48 countries assembled together at the United Nations in Paris to make a profound statement regarding the value and dignity of human life. They all agreed upon a set of basic rights that were inborn legacy due to all human beings on earth irrespective of their geographical location. Key role was played by Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of President Franklin Roosevelt and John Peters Humphrey, a renowned authority on international law who wrote its first draft and worked to guide it through its adoption in 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a profoundly important document for people all over the world because it is based on three key principles: human rights are inalienable, indivisible and interdependent. In its preamble and in Article 1, the Declaration unequivocally proclaims the inherent rights of all human beings: "Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people...All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not a document that is legally binding but many of these rights, in various forms, are today part of the constitutional laws of democratic nations.

Undoubtedly the pogrom of World War II was the decisive marker in making people realize the flagrant human rights violations and crime against humanity but this does not let us ignore that human rights abuses have marred human history. A scrutiny of the literary texts can make us realize the point of intersection between literature and human rights and how literature has taken a committed stand to uphold human rights. Literature merits consideration because it is the site where human nature with its variegated nuances and complexities have been sought to be understood. The very basis of human rights is civil law which draws on the enlightenment principles that we are endowed with "reason and conscience" (1<sup>st</sup> article of the UDHR). However a great deal of what constitutes human nature is unconscious and emotional drives which eschews any internal logic. Nonetheless such heterogeneities are an indelible part of human existence and literature addresses such logic and illogicalities in an engaged way and hence can be a fruitful area to investigate the interdisciplinary nature of human rights and literature.

The present paper is firmly based on the aforementioned discussion and it would investigate Sophocles' *Antigone* with a human rights lens. Composed way back in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, *Antigone* is a testament of human rights and the unflinching support that a sister renders for her brother even at the cost of her life. When we discuss the issue of human rights in *Antigone* we should not be oblivious of its context of production but at the same time we should also be perceptive enough and unravel the foreshadowing of human rights issues that are burgeoning in today's world. The