



## Literature and Society

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### Abstract:

*Literature can be very helpful to society provided it is studied, or applied in a positive manner, but it can be very detrimental to society if what is contained within it is used with malice. I will be focusing on how literature is helpful to society. Literature means something that is written for refreshing and inspiring the mind. Literature is important in our life, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. It is through reading such great literary and poetic works, that one understands life. They help a person take a closer look at the different facets of life. In many ways, it can change one's perspective towards life. Literature appeals to both the heart and soul of the people hence it can be a powerful tool for change. Karl Marx and Engels literature had great effect on many nations in the world while Marxism is an abused term today, yet we see that Karl Marx laid down the ideologies that were imperatives of a society which was moving from agriculture to industrialization.*

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### 1. Introduction

Literature enriches the mind and reading as they say makes a man perfect. Today there are books available on a variety of subjects, books meant for education, books meant for entertainment and books meant for self- development. There is a book for each one's choice. Literature can be very helpful to society provided it is studied, or applied in a positive manner, but it can be very detrimental to society if what is contained within it is used with malice. For this discussion I will be focusing on how literature is helpful to society. All said and done, literary enlightenment of a society is the true measure of its development and progress. As stated in the quotation by C.S. Lewis, literature not only describes reality but also adds to it. Yes, literature is not merely a depiction of reality; it is rather a value-addition. Literary works are portrayals of the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. They are a depiction of the different facets of common man's life. Classical literary works serve as a food for thought and a tonic for imagination and creativity. Exposing an individual to good literary works, is equivalent to providing him/her with the finest of educational opportunities. On the other hand, the lack of exposure to classic literary works is equal to depriving an individual from an opportunity to grow as an individual.

Literature means something that is written for refreshing and inspiring the mind. It records the thoughts and feelings of great minds. It attracts in two ways-through its matter and through its manner. The matter must be such that those who read it are interested in some way. The manner must be such as will be pleasing to the reader and adds to his fund of knowledge. Naturally, if we have the power of language to express the feelings, we are well on the way to creating literature. In other words, the subject matter of literature is society in some form or other. The poet expresses his feeling and we who read his poetry are interested and feel at one with him and

ourselves. After all, society is this bond of fellowship between man and man through communication that the poet or writer seeks.

## **2. The importance of literature in our life**

Literature represents a language or a people: culture and tradition. But, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. Literature introduces us to new worlds of experience. We learn about books and literature; we enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and we may even grow and evolve through our literary journey with books. Literature is the foundation of life. It places an emphasis on many topics from human tragedies to tales of the ever-popular search for love. While it is physically written in words, these words come alive in the imagination of the mind, and its ability to comprehend the complexity or simplicity of the text. Literature enables people to see through the lenses of others, and sometimes even inanimate objects; therefore, it becomes a looking glass into the world as others view it. It is a journey that is inscribed in pages, and powered by the imagination of the reader. Ultimately, literature has provided a gateway to teach the reader about life experiences from even the saddest stories to the most joyful ones that will touch their hearts.

## **3. The Role of Literature for Individuals and Society**

Literature has two roles, an active, engaging role and a passive, reflective role. The active role represents the very action of reading. This role is a significant part of an individual's development. From reading, an individual forms ideas and concepts about the world in which they live. These ideas and concepts form together into an ideology of sort. From this ideology stems individual motivation, action, and engagement. For example, one's decision to become a social activist may stem from a reading of Karl Marx and his discussion of the alienated worker or Gayatri Spivak and her musings about the subaltern. One's decision to become a Christian – be it a 'born again evangelical' or a traditional Episcopalian – is heavily influenced by the act of reading.

The second role is distinguishable from the first in that it is a thing observed, rather than a thing done. The reflective role of literature is to "show" to society the history of ideologies, of thought, and of action. It reveals what people thought during a particular time and how they thought about it. It allows the individual to understand how a society functioned and why it functioned that way. For example, an individual reading through Ernst Bloch will peer into the hearts and minds of the German people during the early 19<sup>th</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> century. There, one can find the ideas of the German ideology and how it functioned in central Europe during the given time period. Or, returning to the Judeo-Christian example, the principles upon which ancient and classical societies were built can be inferred from reading the Bible – Hosea's rebuke of an immoral nation or Paul's condemnation of discrimination based on class.

## **4. Bound between the literature and society**

Literature expresses social sympathies; naturally it is bound to exercise some positive influence on our mind and attitude. Society reacts to literature in a living way. An inspiring poem creates general influence on society. It rouses our feelings and enthusiasm for welfare. Shelley has called poets the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. The function of a legislator is to lay down the law, a settled course of action that men may follow. Poetry and literature generally do this in a quiet and unobtrusive way. Novels are known to have changed the direction of the human mind and set in motion movements that have altered our ways of life.

The influence of literature on society is felt directly or indirectly. Thus Miss Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was directly responsible for a movement against slavery in literature and life in USA of those days. The novels of Dickens had an indirect influence in creating in society a feeling for regulating and removing social wrongs, calling for necessary reforms. Sarat Chandra's novels have gone a long way in breaking conservatism as regards women in our society. It is, however, clear that if we are interested in literature, and its influence is bound to move us amply. Literature is made out of the lore of life. No doubt, the realistic artist brings to a focus the oddities and cruder aspects of life overmuch. But to know life fully, not only the bright side but also the seamy and dark side of life is to be known.

Thus, society creates literature. It may be described as the mirror of the society. But the quality and nature of the reflection depends upon the writer's attitude of mind, whether he is progressive in his outlook or reactionary. Naturally, conservative-minded writer will stress those aspects of social life, which put the traditional ways of life in the best possible way. For example, he will set a high value on reverence for age-old ideals, respect for religion, chastity of woman and so on. On the other hand, a progressive writer will tend to show how old ideals act as restraints on the natural freedom of the human mind, cripple the free movement of man and women in an unrestricted atmosphere, set for liberating new ideals and moving society that looks forward to newer ways of life.

We live in a society. That is, there are relations and interrelation between men who live in the society. We like to hear about our fellow men that live in society, their thoughts and feelings, their likes and dislikes.

### **5. Social function of literature**

The social function of literature takes on many forms. Literatures main function is to inform, arrange words into a meaningful format, yet the social function has far greater implications. Mythology can be defined as the study and interpretation of myth and the body of myths of a particular culture. Myth is an extremely complex cultural phenomenon that portrays the symbolic language and fundamental elements and hypothesis of a culture. The social function of mythology therefore is relative to many periods in history.

The study of mythology, as previously intimated is complex as it is interdisciplinary, encompassing both religious and philosophical beliefs: "A serviceable image of the physical environment and daily life of a society remote in time and place may be conjured up by an agile and well-furnished mind, but it is very much harder to apprehend its religious beliefs. Whatever the degree of our attachment to our own traditions, it is almost impossible for us to step out of their framework and strip familiar.

### **6. Positive outlook towards life**

It is through reading such great literary and poetic works, that one understands life. They help a person take a closer look at the different facets of life. In many ways, it can change one's perspective towards life. Lives of brilliant achievers and individuals, who have made a valuable contribution to society, are sketched in their biographies. These works give the readers an insight into the lives of these eminent people, while also serving as a bible of ideals.

### **7. Literature and socialization**

Man is a social animal and depends upon society to develop and acquire his full potential. When man sets down his experiences that explore the texture and meaning of human endeavor, it becomes literature. Obviously literature mirrors the manners and mores of the society and the *raison d'être* of its ideology, culture, subjectivity, objectivity and collective wisdom. All these aspects affect the principles that form the cornerstones of a society and help it become efficient and effective.

History does not bear testimony to any work of literature that contributed to some landmark change or war but literature all over the world contributes to a reflection upon the prevalent situation in a society. It has been inspiring, critical. Yet relevant to the times it belonged to. Profoundly literature has also been the source of imagination, Prophecy and Reflections that have endured the test of the time. Literature thus is the soul of the society which can teach the man how to live and one of the main mottos of literature is “to live and let to live”.

Complex emotions and symbols, morals and intellectual considerations are engaged by literature to show its artistic form. The complexity and subtlety of everyday existence are used as forms in literature to explain an experience, there is also rhythm, repetition and contrast which help to buildup sensible aesthetics. Literary artists have higher sensibility and power of perception hence they convey experience with intensity and imagination. So, literature is able to lay down fundamentals for positive living.

### **8. Literature as a mirror of society**

Mirror has that unique quality of being candidly honest; it reflects whatever it sees without evaluation or judgment. Most literary writers also attempt to speak candidly about their times so as to goad the power to change for the better. They use images and ironies to reveal their anguish but it is often seen that such works are appreciated after its time in hindsight. Like a mirror literature helps to make a clear assessment of what is wrong and what needs to be done to better the society.

The contribution of literature to any given society is immense. Literature has the capacity to mould the thinking of a whole Age; it is the mirror of the society. Authors and poets reflect the development of society and people in their compositions which helps us to classify them into various periods. The Literature of a particular period can be easily identified by its style of writing or genre as it is representative of its time. Literature is also a mode to express public opinion in variety of genres. It is also a part of tradition, one we pass on to our future generation. It tells us of our rich culture and gives us a sense of pride in our country. Literature is the lighthouse of any culture and to know any culture better we must know its literature as it gives us a true picture of the culture and its development. The extant remains of the literary texts of earlier civilizations throw light on our past and gauge our development.

### **9. The role of literature in society**

Good literature is one which reaches out to people and makes an impact on the society said Tamil Writer Ponneelan on Delivering the Tamil Writer D. Jayakanthan endowment lecture at Tamil University, Literature has a major impact on the development of society. It has shaped civilizations, changed political systems and exposed injustice. Literature gives us a detailed preview of human experiences, allowing us to connect on basic levels of desire and emotion. However, just as it has constructed societies, the writings and works of certain authors have

degraded societies to their most primitive form. Literature's main role is to picture society; it is both the eye and light of society which enables reflections of the structures of society.

Its major role is communication, it communicates the way people do things together through a variant of forms - it takes different ways to exposed - the worldview of a people and values and a peoples own knowledge system - through satire, humor or even poetic forms. Therefore literature's position in society is equal to that of - the sun - in the universe. Remove the sun from its prescribed position in the primordial triad of creation - and darkness will traverse the earth infinitely in continuum. Subtract literature from society and ignorance, illiteracy, frailty of the present and future will become the characteristic annotations and denotations of a grim existence.

Literature also has an important role in giving the reader hope. It can be used to get them through difficult times by letting the reader relate to the protagonist of the story. These books often seem to be written by an author who is using the book as a way of telling their own account of an event. 'Tiger Eyes' by Judy Blume and 'Bitter Fruit' by Brian Keaney both deal with young teenage girls whose father's have died. It shows how this has affected them and could help people going through this with

The role of literature in society is there - irrevocably and irreversibly - without any alternative - not even history - because literature is an aspect of truth which defines - being, explicate trends about that being and analyze important issues of society. So literature will tell about how a people came to their current position, their journey's and toil - for self realization, identity and the very concept of being.

### **10. The effect of literature on society**

Literature creates the imaginary worlds, imaginary ideas, thoughts and wisdom. These aspects become embodiments of the dramatic experience. The reader of literature partakes of these embodiments and explores the basic fundamental rules that govern human nature and also the structure of the world. The wise litterateurs of yore had understood that fundamentally the affairs of mankind, the basic good in man asserts itself thus through religious values and system with which they created structures in society, so that mankind would not stumble about in the darkness and destruction but world spent its time on future research and analysis for the betterment of the society. Literature appeals to both the heart and soul of the people hence it can be a powerful tool for change. The change can be both positive and negative. We see today those nations that do not have high value literary traditions are the most stringent warmongers of the world. A society or a group always needs norms and rules to sustain its ideologies and cultural mornings.

The works of Karl Marx and Engel had great effect on many nations in the world while Marxism is an abused term today, yet we see that Karl Marx laid down the ideologies that were imperatives of a society which was moving from agriculture to industrialization. The greatest defect of Marxism was that it was too utopian and idealistic and not very practical. Moving to Europe we have the French revolution which is known as only the revolution that was set off by intellectuals during the period of romanticism like Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire.

### **11. Conclusion**

There are many parts of literature we can fin like prose, theater or poetry, drama etc. They all forms are mostly gives entertainment and pleasure and knowledge to the society. But the main

function of literature is to “Reform” the society. If there is a proper them related to society and its problems it can reform or vanish such kind of problems. So, there is a close relation between society and literature.

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