



An Analysis on the Purpose of Literature

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Abstract:

One of the chief purposes of literature is a means of exploring what it is to be human. It is also a way of communicating with others about a huge range of ideas and concerns. Put simply, Literature helps us to understand people, societies, events, culture. One of the chief purposes of literature is a means of exploring what it is to be human. It is also a way of communicating with others about a huge range of ideas and concerns. Put simply, Literature helps us to understand people, societies, events, culture. Many students struggle when it comes to analyzing English literature. It can be difficult to identify and understand the underlying themes behind a text. Here, are some tips to help you improve your English lit analysis.

The reasearcher wants to study about the analytical study about litreture and the purpose of litreture. In this way the researcher discussed about the purpose of litreture via this study.

Keywords: *English literature, purposes of literature, Way of Communication*

1. Introduction

It is always difficult to define anything. Even when we try to define a simple thing like table, we find it difficult but we certainly know what a table is. The word 'literature' has been used very loosely. Very often, everything that is printed or written is called literature. We often talk of literature about computer, a T.V. or a motor car. In this sense, books or written material on any subject is literature. The books on medicine, science, geography or philosophy can be called literature in this broad sense. That's why De Quincey divided literature into two divisions:

2. Literature of Knowledge

This kind of literature means books or writings that give us information or knowledge. It appeals to our head not to our heart. It informs but does not move.

3. Literature of Power

This kind of literature is what we call 'literature proper'. It is one of the arts which provide aesthetic pleasure. It is a thing of beauty which gives us a sort of pleasure which we never get from other things. Longinus called it 'a sublime delight'.

Now as a student of literature, we are concerned with 'literature proper'. First of all, let us try to define literature though it is not easy to do so.

"Literature is writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitude towards life." This definition can be explained with the help of following points:

- **Medium**

Literature is a writing. The raw material of literature is words. The other arts have different media. For example, painting uses colors or lines, sculpture uses stone or metal, music uses sound or notes. Literature is meant to be read. It is not a pure art like music because it consists of other arts like music and the visual.

- **Expression**

It expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitude towards life. This means that literature is an expression of the feelings and thoughts of a writer. It is often subjective in nature.

- **Communication**

Literature is communication. There can be no literature if there is no reader. The author wants to communicate what he has thought, felt or seen.

- **Interpretation of life**

The other important characteristic of literature is expression of interpretation of life. The author wants to share with us that he has understood about life. Literature grows out of life and the purpose of literature is to interpret life. It teaches us how to live.

- **Permanence**

Literature is intended to be permanent. The quality of permanence is one of the most important characteristics of literature. A journalist or an advertisement writer writes for the immediate present. He does not write for future generation. Immortality is always desired by most of the writers. A poet makes himself and his subject immortal. The Roman poet Catullus wrote a beautiful poem on the death of sparrow which his girl friend Lesbia kept as a pet. Even today the poet, Lesbia and her sparrow are alive in the minds of the readers.

- **Purpose to delight**

The purpose of literature is not to give information or knowledge. Its purpose is to delight. The literature provides aesthetic pleasure.

- **Universality**

Literature has a quality of universality. It is not limited to any country or age. Great literature is for all the time and all the countries. This is the reason why we still read and enjoy 'The Iliad', 'The paradise lost', 'Hamlet' or great Indian classics like 'The Mahabharata' or 'Ramayana'.

- **Use of Imagination**

Literature is often called imaginative literature. This means that the poet uses his imagination in his works. He does not present the dry facts. That is why it is said that literature is more truthful than history. It presents not what had happened but what might happen, not what is but what may be.

4. Good Literature

Generally, anything that is written or printed is called literature. But we are concerned with literature proper. It is a writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitude towards life. Even among what we call literature proper, really good literature is very little. It is not right to say that "this book is not literature at all." It is better to say, "This is not a good poem or novel." Most of the literature is mediocre, some is Bad, some is good and very little is great. Now let us discuss what qualities make good literature. We can enumerate the following qualities or characteristics of good literature.

4.1 Criticism of Life

Good literature should be life enhancing. It should be an interpretation of life. As Shakespeare puts it in 'Hamlet' it should 'hold mirror up to nature.' This means that true literature represents life. It makes us partake in the different experiences of life. Individual life is limited. We cannot have all the experience in a single life. Literature provides us an opportunity to experience all the different aspects of life. In an individual life, we cannot know many people and we are hardly able to understand a few people. Literature makes us peep into the minds of many people. It makes us go deep into human psyche. As W.H. Hudson says, "literature puts us in broader contact with life."

4.2 Originality

Originality is a true test of great literature. Originality does not mean newness but it means genuineness. This means that the artist's experience should be his own. It is not the quantity of

experience but quality of experience that makes literature great. We often find younger poets greater than the older poets. This shows that the younger poets possess experiences which have vitality and originality. It is said that Jane Austen wrote domestic novel because she never went out except to her limited family circle. Her novels ring with truth because they represent fidelity to her experience. If we try to find really original work, we can never find such a book or work. Shakespeare's plays are based on stories of different countries and history. He borrowed raw material from history and literature of past writers of different countries. In this sense one cannot call Shakespeare original. This means that originality does not mean something new. It means that the treatment of the subject is original. T.S. Eliot borrowed the story of Thomas Beckett for his poetic drama 'Murder in the cathedral' but his play is highly original because the treatment of the subject is personal and original. The central themes of all literature are the same. For example, love is an age-old subject of literature. Thousands of poets have written on love and thousands will continue to write on it. So, originality consists of looking at the subject in a new way.

4.3 Craftsmanship of Technical Skill

Literature is not only a matter of inspiration. It requires practice and technique. Alexander Pope said of great literature,

“What oft was thought, but never so well expressed.”

A good writer must have technical perfection and mastery of the language is the medium of literature. So, a good writer should be an expert in the grammar and the usage of his own language. He should have control over a large vocabulary. He should be familiar with the great literary works of the past in his own and other languages. He should be the master of style. A poet should have the command of metres, rhythm and a sensitive ear to the sounds. He should be in love with the words. There is no training school for the writers or poet but a good poet or a writer must work hard to master the technical skill and craftsmanship. In short, technical skill is necessary in great work of art but we must *remember that only craftsmanship cannot make literature great.*

4.4 Moral Consciousness

It is often debated whether literature should teach. It is true that the purpose of literature is to please or provide aesthetic pleasure. But a great literature always stands for the good. Literature never favors the evil, In India, we say that art is Satyam (truth), Shivam (good), Sundaram (beautiful). This means that literature is not only beautiful and true but it is good also. Directly or indirectly, the artist supports the good. This is moral consciousness of the artist. All the great artists of the world like Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Ibsen or Hardy have stood for Morality and against the evil. There is eternal war between good and evil. An artist upholds the good and fights against the evil. Thus, literature does service to mankind.

5. The Uses of Literature

In modern time, we have become so utilitarian that we always undertake an activity keeping in mind its usefulness. The age in which we live is called the age of science and technology. Naturally, we ask the question to ourselves-“What is the use of studying Literature?” The function of Literature depends on its nature. Literature has no direct purpose except aesthetic pleasure. Now let us discuss the possible reason for the study of literature.

1. First of all, literature provides us with the knowledge of the people and the country of that particular language. For example, if we study English literature, we get the knowledge of English people and England we come to know not only England of the present day but her history also. If we study Shakespeare's plays, we know the Elizabethan England, we also get knowledge of English monarchy and democracy. In one or the other way, we come to know the English mind. If we read Thomas Hardy, we come to know about Wessex people and the surroundings of the area. In the same way, Charles Dickens gives us the picture of Victorian England. Wordsworth's poetry

takes us into the Lake District. This is true of literature of all countries. We certainly come to know the social, political background of the language and the country in which literature is produced. The study of Greek and Latin literature enriched the English literature and influenced the whole of Europe. Through the study of literature, we come to know human beings. We also realize that ultimately human beings and their problems and pleasures are essentially the same.

2. One of the most important uses of literature is pleasure. We derive enjoyment from literature. Millions of people get a great deal of pleasure from reading. The student of literature also enjoys the study of literature because the nature of literature is primarily an aesthetic pleasure. The pleasure which we derive from literature is of sublime nature. It is more than the material pleasure. It gives us a glimpse of spiritual bliss.
3. The study of literature, in modern time is often prescribed in course as a subject. Students study literature as a subject and pass examinations. This kind of study provides for in-depth study and research into the subject. Very often a student of literature studies it in a scientific manner. Unlike ordinary reader, he applies critical tools and passes judgment on merits or demerits of a particular work of art.
4. The knowledge of literature provides understanding of many other subjects. We can learn history, geography, political science, philosophy through literature. Many great people have learnt many useful lessons by reading books. In all activities and fields of knowledge, we can get more knowledge by reading books than we can ever get through personal experience. It does not mean that personal experience is less important than reading. We can never substitute personal experience with reading of books. But literature can certainly broaden our understanding of life, the world and human nature.
5. It is often said that the study of history teaches us to avoid the mistakes of the past. The same is true about literature because literature is imaginative history. The use of literature is thus the same as the use of history and philosophy. It helps us towards a better understanding of ourselves and fellow human beings.
6. (6) It is often debated whether we should study literature for any morals. It is question whether it is duty of the artist to teach something. Should an artist play the role of a moral teacher? We cannot say that an artist is a moral teacher but it is true that he often plays such a role. An artist has keen perception and understanding of life. He often gives us the vision of life. He sometimes becomes a mediator between man and God. Milton said that his purpose was, "to justify the ways of God to man." Aristotle used to say that study of literature makes us better human being.

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