



## Interrelation between Literature and Society

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### **Abstract:**

*The history of literature dates back to the dawn of human civilization. The societies were formed by the human beings with objectives of fulfilling the human needs and aspirations. Setting aside which came first—the literature or society—the aim of the author is to depict the picture of literature in society and vice versa. Literature is the product of the society. Literature represents life and ‘life’ is a social reality. Literary artists are the members of the society with a specific social status. They address the people, who are also social beings. In the earlier society, it was unable to distinguish literature from devices like symbolism, rituals, traditions and conventions, which are social in their very nature. In the later days, the relationship between literature and society became more and more indirect. In modern times, the literary artist has cut off his ties with the class to which he actually belongs.*

*The degree of integration of the artists into social process is very close in popular literature and very distant in free creative genius. Though the writers of modern times are isolated from society, some good writers have created their own public. The literary artist is not only influenced by society, but he also influences the society. Art not only reproduces life, but also shapes it. This Research paper is a humble attempt to concentrate on how both literature and society have remained inseparable from each other. It further reveals that literature cannot sustain without society, and likewise the society too cannot be unnoticed in literary pieces in one way or another.*

**Keywords:** civilization, history, literature, society, life.

### **Introduction:**

What is literature? What is the function of literature? What is its relation to

society? Does society require literature? There are a number of such questions that strike human mind. It is through such question and answer method that we may understand the interrelation of literature and society. Literature is a social institution, which uses devices like symbolism, metre etc. which are social in their very nature. Literature represents life and life is a social reality. The literary artist himself is a member of society with a specific social status. He receives some degree of social recognition and reward. He addresses the people, who are also social beings. In the earlier society, it was unable to distinguish literature from devices like symbolism, rituals, traditions and conventions, which are social in their very nature. Marxist critics have clearly studied the relations between literature and society both in our present society and future classless society. They are not only the students of literature and society, but prophets of the future, even propagandists.

#### **Literature, a mirror of society:**

We all know that literature is a mirror of society. What happens in a society is reflected in literary works in one form or another. The interrelation of literature and society is usually discussed by starting that

‘Literature is an expression of society.’ A society is a group of people related to each other through their continuous and uninterrupted relations. It is also a group of likeminded people largely governed by their own norms and values. This means that literature mirrors the current social situation correctly. However literature depicts only some aspects of society, not the whole life. A writer expresses his experience on his conception of life, but it would be untrue to say that he expresses the whole life of a given time. It is only a limited criterion to say that an author should express the life of his own time fully or that he should be representative of his age or society.

#### **Interrelation between Literature and Society:**

Society is a comprehensive term, which includes the historic setting, the economic basis, the social values, the social ideology and so on. We can evaluate a literary work only after we know the actual relation between literature and society. First of all, we should study the writer and the institution of literature and the status of the writer. Then we have to consider the social purpose of the works of literature and lastly we must consider the readers in relation to social influence of literature. The issue of



how far literature depends on social change and development enters into all the three divisions of our problem viz. sociology of the writer, the content of the work and the influence of the work on society.

Since every writer is a member of society, he can be studied as a social being. His biography can tell us the circumstances in which he lived. We can distinguish between writers according to their degree of integration into social process. It is very close in popular literature and very distant in free creative genius. In modern times, the writer has cut off his ties with the class to which he actually belongs. It is the task of literary sociology to find out the social status, the economic source and the prestige of the writer in each society.

The artist depends upon the society; the society is, at times dependent upon the artist. Every work of art is a faithful, and at times, an idealized social picture. Thomas Warton rightly points out that literature has the “peculiar merit of faithfully recording the feature of the times, and of preserving the most picturesque and expressive representation of manners.” William Hazlitt has a strong awareness of the intimate relation between literature and society. A poet, even a lyric poet, has to depend upon

the society. Even Shakespeare, the world fame literary figure, was not an isolated genius; his age was necessary to him. The Renaissance has left its imprint on the literature of the age. His plays ring with the entire range of the Elizabethan experience. Shakespeare and Marlowe felt the public pulse, the heart beats of the society. Likewise, Marlowe’s plays are an embodiment of the Renaissance and the Elizabethan spirit. He gave voice to the traits of his age- passion for knowledge, lust for power, limitless aspiration, enthusiasm for discovery etc. His plays are a poignant expression of man’s unconquerable mind. The entire process- economic, sociological, ideological, emotional- determines the direction and character of the literature of the age. Society also determines the literary genre. As G.M. Trevelyan says, “To remote posterity, the memorable fact about Elizabethan England will be that it produced the plays of Shakespeare. It is not merely that the greatest of mankind happened to be born in that age. His work would never have been produced in any other period than those late Elizabethan and early Jacobean times in which it was his luck to live. He could not have written as he did, if the men and women among whom his



days were passed had been other than they were.....”

The essays of Addison and Steele published in *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* are valuable social documents. As Macaulay remarks, “In *The Spectator* we once again see the inevitable eighteenth century, with the churches thronging with the daily worshippers, the beaux gathering in the coffee-house, the gentry going to the drawing-rooms, ladies thronging in the toy-shops, the charman jostling in the streets.” Addison and Steele sought to curb the fashion of the age. An exponent of the new middle class morality, Addison certainly elevated the tone of English life. He felt shocked at the mischiefs of party spirit, and tried his utmost to foster the spirit of unity.

#### **History of the dependence of the author on the society:**

In popular oral literature, we can study the role of the singer, who was depended on the favour of his public. So are the bards of ancient Greece, the folk story-tellers in the Orient and Russia. In Greece, the writers of tragedies hymns had special religious status. Among the Romans, the writers like Virgil, Horace, Ovid and others depended upon the bounty and goodwill of the ruler of the state. In the middle ages,

there were the Monk in his cell, the troubadour at the court depended upon the bounty of barons. In those days, the writer was either a scholar or a singer or an entertainer. He had to earn his livelihood on the roads. With the Renaissance, there arose a class of humanists, who wandered from country to country and offered their services to different patrons. Petrarch was such first writer. Afterwards, the support by patrons was replaced by the publishers, who were acting as agents of the reading public. The writer depended upon his published works and the reading public. In England, the patronage system almost stopped early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Pope earned a large fortune from his translation of Homer. However the great financial rewards came only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Scott and Byron influenced public taste greatly. The growth of the reading public made literature more and more independent. As Ashley Thorndike urges, the printed matter was not addressed to a uniform public, but it was divided by many subjects, interests and purposes. In ‘Fiction and The Reading Public’, Q.D. Leavis points out that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a man had to read what the gentry and University man read. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were different classes of reading



public, reading different types of books. In our times, we have books for all types of people- small boys, high school boys, trade journals, house organs, Sunday School Weeklies, Westerns, true story romances etc. Today, the social status of the writer depends upon the public, which he addresses and upon which he is dependent financially.

In the earlier society, the dependence of the author was greater. The author had to please the audience immediately. In later days, when the relationship between the author and the public became more and more indirect, there were a number of intermediaries like social institutions, clubs, the academy, the universities etc. The critic is also an important middle-man. Modern governments too, support literature in several ways such as patronage, control and supervision. Sometimes, the control may be negative like censorship and it may be positive like the encouragement of books. In Russia, such supervision is harmful to literature and aesthetics.

### **Interdependence of Literature and society:**

It is observed that human society is characterized by the patterns of relationship between individuals who share cultures, traditions, beliefs and values etc. With the

passage of time, owing to changes taking place in environment and with emergence of new technologies, we observe that the societies have not remained stubborn with regards to their norms and values, the reflections of which can be found in different forms of literature. Consequently, the writers of modern times are isolated from society. So the theory of *Art for Art's sake* became current. Sometimes the artists may be hostile to the society and they see no hope of changing it. No definite conclusion has been drawn regarding the writer, the influence of economic factors and the public opinion on the writer. The relation is not merely of dependence on the public. Some good writers can create their own public. The writer is not only influenced by society, but he too influences society. Art not only reproduces life, but also shapes it. Literature and the literary books have a tremendous influence on society.

People model their lives upon the life style of fictional heroes and heroines. They love, commit crimes and even suicides according to the books. Novels of Sir Walter Scott have increased the national pride through the memory of historical events. Of course it is tough to know how far the literary influence affects the society exactly.



We can generalize that the younger generation is more influenced by books than the old generation. So, in order to understand how literature affects the society, we must see its appeal to the human race and not to the connoisseurs.

The subjects of literature have been changing as they cover multiple spheres of life and society. So has been the case with the language of literature also. Language is one of the tools or mediums of expressing ideas and thoughts, both in oral and written forms. Different societies have used and are still using different languages for the fulfilment of individuals' and societies' aspirations. Sometimes it is noticed that many charges are labelled against literature as well as society. Another question that strikes our mind is if literature reflects only the events taking place in a society. Do the occurrences taking place in persons' lives become catalytic agent in literary creations? Here, poetry, one of the forms of literature, comes out in natural and without deliberated form immediately after the events take place in life and nature. The Poetry of Wordsworth is based on memory. He thinks of the past events and comes under the impact of past impressions with a high degree of emotions and feelings. For him, as

he himself says in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802) "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility." In all such and many other cases the emergence of literary creativity is followed on from the acts and events in life and nature. However, the poet sometimes becomes so much imaginative that he thinks of the events to be followed by his literary composition, and in some cases it happens true. This is because of high level of imaginative excellence of a writer that what he thinks, though possibly unreal, is reflected in his writing. One may put charge on him saying what he has written is largely based on fancy and personal hallucination. His observations are more psychic than real. But as an individual he is also a part of society he lives in.

#### **Conclusion:**

Thus, it appears that society acts like back up for culture and tradition of the people it reflects upon and the inhabitants of a group of society share certain similarities with regard to assumptions, beliefs, caste, creed, myths, religion etc. Literature, when combined with culture and other facets – both abstract and concrete--of society, not only presents insubstantial subjects like



alienation, assimilation and transformation in society but also reflects the clear issues, such as historical, political and social facts.

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