



What is Literature?

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Literature, Expression, Themes, Reader and Author

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ABSTRACT

Since from the birth of man, in one or the other way, he is connected to many elements of his surroundings, and he has been making a constant effort to express himself. The expressions might have been in many ways. Literature is also one such expression, contribution and product of him. Defining the word 'Literature' means a lot since it has taken birth out of man; the attempt of understanding 'Literature' is like a mother's utmost care for her new born baby.

Literature is an artistic expression of the best that is known and thought in world. It is a fine record of man's ideas and ideals, aspirations and ambitions, joys and sorrows and experiences and excitements. It deals with the great drama of human life and action. According to Prof. G. Basappa, "Man, a social animal and by virtue of the actual make-up of his nature, is under the urge of a constant desire to share his experiences and emotions with those around him. This results in artistic creation-poetry, play, story, novel, essay, music, painting, sculpture, etc." (p. 7)

Literature, in other words, is the blossom of literary artist's aspiration for self-expression. His intellectual, emotional and spiritual stirrings will have urgency to find fair satisfaction and the result will be literature or fine art (p. 7). Rich experience, vast knowledge and creative skill form the impulse to his artistic creation.

Themes for Literature:

Literature reflects the interest of the writer in the people and their life in its rich variety that constitutes his theme. The world of reality in which the writer lives and the world of imagination which he imagines as real also form the subject-matter of literary art (p. 7). Literature can also take birth as a beauty of form owing to the love of form the writer intensely feels. "It not only communicates aesthetic experience but also yields aesthetic satisfaction, not only to the creator but also to all those who come under its charming influence, by the manner in which it handles its themes." (Basappa, p. 7)

Literature may also consist of personal experiences of an individual as its themes. The experiences consist of all those things which make up the sum total of his private life-outer and inner; his love and hatred, joy and sorrow, success and failure. Further, those great common themes of life and death, sin and destiny, God and man's relation with God, and the destiny of race in this life and beyond it, also form the content of literature (p. 8). These common themes go beyond the individual lot and belong to the whole of humanity.

Also, the relation between man and man or the entire social world with all its problems and plights is touched on by literature (p. 8). Not only the human element but also the external world of nature with its varied colors, sounds, shape and life-rhythms comes under the purview of literature. Even man's relation with nature and her influence on him are treated by it. Thus, according to Prof. G. Basappa, "individual's inner and outer life, nature's varied manifestation, vicissitudes of humanity and the world of imagination, all constitute the grist for the grind mill of literature. But literature like art owes its birth solely to man's desire for aesthetic creation and aesthetic enjoyment." (p. 8)

What does Literature do?

Literature, as Prof. G. Basappa mentions in his *Literary Criticism: Criticism-Prosody and History of the Language*, does establish a perfect rapport between the mind of the reader and the mind of the writer (p. 10). "The reader plunges deeply into any great work which is a matter of actual communication between its author and the reader. The reader listens to him and does his best to enter sympathetically into his feeling and thought. He notes carefully how the author has looked at life, what he found in it and what he brought away from it. Besides, he observes how the world of experience impressed the writer and how it is interpreted through his personality" (Basappa, p. 10-11).

The reader who becomes nearer to the author knows author's character and outlook, his strength and weakness and voice of those with whom he talks in real life. Thus, literature makes the readers share in a life larger, richer and more varied than the readers can ever know of their own individual life (p. 11).

Literature introduces the writer irrespective of whatever era he belongs.

"Literature has a wider connotation. It refers not merely to isolated book and author but also to the time in which the writer lived and the place to which he belonged." (Basappa, p. 11)

The French critic Hippolyte Taine, as Prof. G. Basappa observes, has propounded his own theory of literature. He holds that literature is the product of race, milieu and moment (p. 12).

"By race, he means the hereditary temperament and disposition of a people; by milieu, he means the totality of their surroundings, their climate, physical environment, political institutions, social conditions and the like; and the moment he takes to mean the spirit of the period or of the particular stage of national development which has been reached at any given time." (Basappa, p. 12)

By this formula, he subordinates literature to the study of society and treats it as a document in the history of national psychology but not as pure literature.

However, the definition of the word 'Literature' is not so simple. Though there have been given thousands of definitions to the word 'Literature', the particular definition is not so easily possible since every formula or definition of 'Literature' has to go through the criticism. As Prof. G. Basappa argues, "Finally, a question arises, whether every book is literature; e.g. law, science, astronomy, medicine or theology." He also says, "Not all books or treatises can be called literature. A piece of real literature is characterized by universality of in-

terest and artistic style. Any book or treatise instinct with the purely artistic qualities of 'largeness, sanity and attraction of form' can rightly be called literary creation." (Basappa, p. 14)

Conclusion:

Whatever the word 'Literature' defines, eventually, it has connection with human beings. We have to care for literature. In the words of Hudson, "We care for literature primarily on ac-

count of its deep and lasting human significance." (2009, p. 10) Further, he says, "Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language." (2009, p. 10)

REFERENCE

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