



Literature: A Realistic Representation of Life

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Abstract

The word ‘Literature’ evokes various ideas and encompasses different forms, styles and motives. The prominent dictionaries claim it to be, ‘writing in prose or verse, especially: writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.’ History bears witness of the phenomenal changes and revolutions which literary works and words or in short, literature have brought upon the human civilization. So can it be considered that literature is a realistic representation of life? “For literature as a whole grows and changes from generation to generation.... A writer of exceptionally powerful personality is certain to stamp his impress upon his age.”^[1]

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the realistic approach of literature and how it invokes the real and sometimes bitter realities of our world. While sometimes create hope and assurance of a better future. Sometimes becomes the mouth piece of the subjugated and victimised, while sometimes it becomes a weapon to instigate insult and guilt in the mind of the oppressor. Literature can be a medium of appraisal, and equally, it can be a medium of criticism. This multi dimensional and multi faced environment that is woven around literature is to be explored in this paper.

Key words: Literature, realistic representation, novels, expressing, conventions, feminism.

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Literature has always been the most preferred medium of expression for those people who want to communicate or impress their thoughts on other peoples mind and, this fact cannot be denied, that a thing that is written leaves an indelible mark on the mind of the reader. Whether we look into the history of human civilization or of literature we find that to be able to say, to interact or to express has played a significant role in the development of any individual. This ability of putting thoughts into words has set humans apart from all living beings.

In such a situation, Literature has a vital role to play in the society. It can direct or moralize. It can motivate or disintegrate. It can highlight as well as hide reality. In other words literature is something that has the potential to alter our very existence. It includes what is within us and outside us. Its topics are infinite. Its area is magnanimous. Limits are unknown and power is abound. Literature exists beyond the borders of the nations and limits of nationalities.



So it creates curiosity in our mind that such an art form and creative output with unlimited power and influence, without the boundaries of cultures, nations or continents can be a true medium of expression. A true mirror of the society. And a realistic representation of life.

Literature has been used by people for expressing their thoughts from time immemorial whether we talk about *Beowulf* which was considered to be the first literary work of worth during Anglo Saxon period although it was later proved to be of Danish origin but still it remains a treasure of English literature. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, has been a realistic portrayal of people around him whether it was the Monk, the Friar, the Priest or the Wife of Bath. Even the context of pilgrimage was a true fact to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket. The people usually came together to visit the shrine to avoid loneliness & boredom and for safety from bandits.

Coming to little later in age to Christopher Marlow and his plays like *Dr. Faustus*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II*, all of which are filled with the true images of human desires and aspirations that can make him blind and force him to take any step or we take the works of Shakespeare for instance, he may be an 'upstart crow' for the University

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Wits but he is the greatest dramatist the world has ever known and his every work has the resemblance of his age. Or we take the examples of Addison and Steel who with their *The Spectator* and *Tatler*, tried to bring out the moral discrepancies and malpractices of their time. Literary history witnessed how poets and writers sold their pen to political parties to gain fame, titles and monetary gains. Alexander Pope satirized the aristocracy of his time in his mock epic *The Rape of the lock*.

The transformation in literature began when it became a component of arousal of human sentiments and righteousness rather than as a form of story narration. Other literary forms like short stories, prose and maybe even poetry were marginalized and novels or fiction and drama gained momentum to become the main instrument of the writers and authors to influence the readers and audience.

The main reasons that made these art forms acceptable to the audience, is the way in which they were and are written. They could easily understand and connect with the authors view point and even find similarities in their life and that of the characters. Usually, the writers whether of the past or present, picked or created characters from real life which make it all the more real and authentic.

B. Prasad quote Meredith calling novel as "a summary of actual life including both within and without of us."^[2] And Meredith was not wrong in saying this because when we read the works of writers like Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, who with their novels painted the real picture of the world around them and were rightly conferred as the true representatives of their age. They portray the society as it was, without any falsity or deception. Whether it is *Pride and Prejudice* or it is *Sense and Sensibility*. *Emma* or *Mansfield Park*, the families are shown with all their follies and foibles which is a true representation of the middle class country society along with their aspirations and conventions.

When we became acquainted with Charles Dickens novels like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* or if we read *Great Expectations*, we come across the plight of children during the



industrial revolution, the abuses of the workhouse system which was the original London life, described with all its pity & pathos in the most realistic way. Not only in these novels, but also in *The Tale of Two Cities* has a theme of war adversaries. It describes the

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consequences of war, with the backdrop of French revolution on the lives of the people whether they were in London or in Paris.

The initial lines itself describe the times in which the novel is set

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...”^[3]

There were many other writers whose works cannot be put aside because they also have their share in changing the outlook of the society, and speaking the unspoken. George Eliot, W. M. Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, D. H Lawrence were no less in any way but they had their own way of moralizing, inspiring, criticizing the social conventions and norms.

H. G. Wells’s prophetic sociological fictions and John Galsworthy’s sociologically psychological dramas all have been the true mirror of the society. But the actual worth of literature can be attached when literature changes the whole course of the society. Written words of Karl Marx, Edmund Burke, Henry David Thoreau ignited the minds of the revolutionaries to raise their voice against the oppressors. It was proved that words were mightier than actions because they inspired and ignited what was hidden and buried deep down inside.

But unlike individually changing the course of the society, some writers joined hands collaboratively to fight against a similar course. One such movement which gained popularity and still delineates a group of writers apart from other writers is ‘Feminism’ and ‘feminist writers’. Development of a near past, this movement gave voice to the problems and plight of women. It is a widespread doctrine that women are a weaker gender and its subjugation is an age old tradition. The feminist movement was a counter attack on the male dominant society which has been dominating the women. Whether we talk about Simone de Beauvoir or any other writers like Mary Wollstonecraft or Margaret Fuller, they all tried to convince the society that legal acts need to be taken to address these issues. But then came women writers

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and poets like Virginia Woolf, Margaret Atwood, Emily Dickenson, have their share in bringing out which was hidden deep within. Recent African women writers like Alice Munro, Buchi Emcheta or British writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Nafisa Haji, etc. irrespective of their belonging and nativity, are forerunners in the field of redemption of women from pitiable and deplorable condition in which they live their lives without uttering a single word or taking a strong stance to relieve their pain. Not only this, they also took note of the aboriginal alienation and rootless existence of the non resident society.



Indian writers were never far behind in the field of literature. Writers like R. K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand , Ali Admad, Sri Aurobindo, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh or Chaman Nahal etc. all have contributed extensively to Indian English literature. Whether they wrote about class difference, colour discrimination or untouchability or they choose the themes of the aftermath of freedom struggle. They wrote the absolute truth and because of that very reason they are not only known but read extensively. Women writers of India like Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Markande, Anita Desai have just like the African and Middle Eastern women writers or other feminist writers have put forth the actual picture of women in India and abroad.

The scope of literature is very vast and its discussion is endless. Literature has been a growing art. Topics may change, readers may change, society and customs may change but the ethics of literature does not change with time. Literature was always and will remain the best way in which the unspoken, the unsaid, the unseen realities can be exposed. Although we cannot deny that the level, quality and preference parameters change every single day. The tags of bestsellers have somewhat created confusion in the mind of the readers and in the literary circle that, Can money be the judge of the quality of the creative work written? and Was the work of the previous writers of less quality or relevance? But the answers to these questions are beyond the limit of this paper and have to remain unanswered.

But it can be said without a shadow of doubt that literature trespasses in the most unlikely corners of mind and heart, body and soul. It invigorates the sentiments and morals, generates hope and we find solutions to our problems. But most important and undeniable fact is that Literature is truly the most realistic representation of life.

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