

Essay=

Literature and Society=

The literature of an age, and its social set up keeping and reacting one over the other. Literature influences the society; society is reflected in Literature and in this way, in all languages and at all times there has been a close interaction between the two.

Literature of any age cannot escape the influence of the social scene and therefore is found reflecting the society of the age when it is created.

The poet, the dramatist, the novelist, the essayist are all the product of their age and their-age openly and clearly gets imaged in their compositions.

Chaucer is called the father of English poetry and actually English literature in its form and language which kept on developing and improving, begins from him. His most representative work is the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales and then the Canterbury Tales.

All the characters painted in these tales are the true representation of the types of such people as they were in his times. While Chaucer is a reflector of those characters and their types of his age — he is virtually and truly described as the chronicler of his age — his characters whether a Knight; the Prioress; the monk, the fat fryer, the sailor, the squire, the priest — all are truly the representatives of their types in the contemporary society as they actually were. Chaucer is a painter as well as a critic of his society.

Shakespeare — the greatest dramatist of English language — one of the greatest of all languages brings in ‘ghosts’, ‘witches’, and ‘courtier’ and ‘fools’ in his plays which were as per the liking of his audience and a part of the English Society of his times.

That is what is rightly said about Shakespeare that in addition to the normal three ‘unities’—Time, Place and Action in drama, he brought about the fourth unity — ‘unity with the people’. That encomium clearly Shakespeare being influenced by the society of his age and in his plays he, though never gave any message or pronounced any philosophy, but that is always there — the triumph of the good over the evil.

This was the message that was most needed to his age after all that had happened earlier — Henry VIII —the king having been killed, Mary Tudor — a despotic, arrogant, a cruel ruler and then a benevolent, all embracing middle-path follower queen — Queen Elizabeth.

As is the king so are the people — is an old but true saying and Shakespeare reflects that hilarious sometimes, but somber and philosophic at the other in his plays.

Hulton was very much the product of his age. A truly puritanical person; a deeply religious man, he gave to his age which was battling with belief and disbelief — the message of God’s triumph over Satan.

The Eighteenth century of English literature is a true product of the age. The social scene had degenerated into debauchery and license after the Restoration of Charles II who

brought along with him all that he had enjoyed during his exile and adjourns in France and the literature of that period reflects all that was happening in the society.

Alexander Pope's 'Rape of the Lock' is a reflection of the so-called lascivious high society of and pungent satire too, on all that was too much too bad for the society. Thus Pope is a reflector as a corrector of his age.

So are Addison and Steele as essayists. Balzac, Zola, Maupassant of France had cast their influence on every Wycherley, conserve and later Restoration dramatists who had gone to the lowest depth in describing social disparity and this is how literature reflected the age.

The French Revolution — a very significant political and social event of Europe had as its basic tenets — Equality, Fraternity and Liberty — and these tenets and the revolution did cast its spell all over Europe and England and the English poets could not escape that influence.

Wordsworth was moved by the humanitarian aspect of the revolution in the earlier phase but later its bloodiness and violence disillusioned him and all this is reflected in Wordsworth's poetry — 'poet of man' and in his later poetry. Shelley was moved by the revolution's 'spirit' of revolution and Byron by its fighting spirit.

Tennyson was a true representative of the Victorian age and sang of the glories of the Empire while his nature poetry gets influenced by the advancement of Science in the later nineteenth century. He did not remain a 'priest of nature' as Wordsworth was because where science advances religion declines.

Charles Dickens saw the backside of industrialization — the poor getting Poorer and the rich richer — the sufferings of the poor are ignored and his novels reflect all this.

The First World War (1914-19) created a group of who sang of the glories of war, of chivalry and Sacrifice for the nation and then there is the post w poetry and post-war drama — Bernard Shaw dramatist known for his pungent satire, pricking the balloon of romanticism associated with war heroism and love in his 'Arms and the Man'. Eliot comes on the literary stage to deal with the utter disillusionment of the age in his 'Wasteland' all this about English Literature.

Similarly in Hindi Literature, when Prithvi Raj Chauhan was fighting valiantly with Mohammad Gori Chandrabardai — the warrior poet was singing of the glories of war and his hero in his 'Prithvi Raj Raso'. Then came the Bhakti Kal — the period of Bhakti — the country and the nation had fallen under the Muslim yoke and there were class conflicts on the basis of faith and religion.

There came on the literary scene, Kabir, who preached anti-fanaticism; pricked the bloated balloon of superstitions and blind faiths and admonished both 'mullahs' and 'Pandits' and showed the way of God. Tulsidas found the Hindu society divided into factions 'Shaivas' and 'Vaishnavas' and showed the path of love, brotherhood and mutual respect for all Gods and presented the ideals of a son, a brother, a wife, and a devotee. The triumph of Ram — the

incarnation of the Good over Ravan, the symbol of Evil is an eternal lesson given by him to the society — whose lessons remain revered even till today.

The period of comparative social peace created a set of poets who indulged in pleasing their patrons — the Kings — as their courtiers and songsters. Their poetry is full of amorous sports in which they make Krishna a Radha and the Gopis their actors — a very wrong a vitiated depiction — unbecoming of those great. This was done just to gratify their patrons — the sensuous and sensual kings. This is how the social scene was reflecting itself in literature.

Then, comes the modern age. The British were ruling India and there were classes close to the ruler and classes suffering at the hands of the officials and at the hands of the so-called elite of the society. There were classes created — the superior, the downtrodden — the imperialists and the nationalists. Prem Chand — the great novelist unravels this class fight in his novels and thereby, not only reflects the society of his times but gives a lesson too. His novels, his short stories — all have a lesson to give.

There was Bhartendu Harishchandra — the poet the harbinger of the modern age and thought, who successfully caricatured the classes — social and religious — thus reflecting the social scene with a point to reform it.

Thus goes on the scene. Maithili Saran Gupta — the Gandhian poet sings of the glory of Ram, of the glory of Lord Buddha, of the glory of other mythological heroes his thrust throughout being to awaken the masses and enlighten them into cordial social contacts. The national fervor reverberated through the veins of the Psyche under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and poets after poets, writers after writers sang of the of our ancient land and its culture. Jai Sanker rasad, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, the poets; Dharmvir Shrilal Shukla — the novelists brought into focus the inequalities and imbalances that plagued the social scene and through their thoughtful and sometimes highly satirical way brought to the fore the social and political malaise through which our present generation passing. This true presentation has been with a purpose — to awaken the social conscience to the problems that dog the people.

Literature thus has been holding the mirror up to Nature on one hand; reflecting all traditions, trends and tendencies while rising up the finger of caution too to guard against all that goes against the basic values of life.

Literature and Society have remained and shall remain ever intertwined and the more they so remain, the more solid would the foundations be laid for a sustained growth; a well-coordinated growth and a corrected social order

Literature has to play its part as a reflector and a corrector of society and society has to inspire men of letters to keep themselves on their guard towards their mission of social good.