

Discerning Meaning and Exploring Co-relationship between Language and Literature

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Abstract. If literature is the soul, Language is its body. Students are familiar with both terms and frequently use them in critical vocabulary. But when they are asked to discriminate between language and literature, they simply look blank. Most people think that difference between the two is somewhat of the tweeledum and tweeldee (slight difference). The present paper explores the basic concepts, definitions and the practical approach of both language and literature. The paper intends not only to explain the two but also discuss the function and role of literature. It will also highlight the chief features of language and literature. It will explain what makes literature, why certain writings are literary and the others are non literary.

Keywords : Language; literature; role of literature; characteristics of language.

The term 'language' and 'literature' are totally different. However, both language and literature have umbilical relation. Literature never exists without language. While language is entirely dependent on words, literature demands depth of feelings, profanity of thoughts and novelty of ideas and above all peculiarity of style. As every artist needs a medium which is supreme art and which requires distinct and original style. No literature is possible unless it is true reflection of the writers' personality. Both language and literature are always evolving. We make language by merely using words, literature requires sincerity, truthfulness of the literary artist.

As a matter of fact the question regarding the function of literature and its chief aim to study has been a debatable topic from Plato down to the modern age. Literature gives the same kind of pleasure as we delight in watching, dancing, singing and movie viewing. Literature is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact and relationship. It is my personal experience of teaching English. Eighty percent of students do not enjoy literature well without the comprehensive knowledge and study of language.

The above discussion necessitates to understand why we study literature and how we are benefitted by it. At first, it has been tried to clarify and comprehend language, its usage and its importance and how it helps in understanding literature. The word 'language' is derived from the Latin word 'lingua' which means tongue. The commonest definition of language is that it is a means of communication. Communication is the chief function of language.

According to Hockett (1958), language is "the most valuable single possession of human race". The usage of language is its integral part. Humboldt

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has also said, “man is man through the use of language alone”. (Aluwalia, 5) It is language which distinguishes man from animals. It is the most important and precious gift of God to man. It is a carrier of civilization from one generation to another. Language gives shape to human thoughts and guides and controls his entire fraternity. The scientific study of language is called Linguistics. It is rather difficult to dwell on the importance, use and the value of language at first. Some of the well-known definitions of language are given below:

- * Language is ‘a systems of sounds, words, patterns, etc. used by humans to communicate thoughts and feelings.’ (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 1989)
- * Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. (Sapir, 1921)
- * A language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements. (Noam Chomsky)
- * Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of social group and participants in its culture communicate. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

Moreover, it is important to know how and why language originated. There are various theories about it. Some of them are the Divine Source Theory, the Natural Sound Source Theory, the Pooh Pooh Theory and the Ding Dong Theory.

According to the first theory, God created Adam and “whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof”. (6) According to Hindu tradition, language came from goddess Saraswati. Most of the linguists also oppose that language is not of divine origin. This theory is known as The Divine Source Theory.

The first human language developed as onomatopoeia imitation of natural sounds, for example bow, wow, moo, ba etc. This theory is known as the Natural Sound Source Theory or the Bow-wow Theory.

Darwin proposed the Pooh-Pooh Theory in 1871. Language begins with interjection or exclamation. The idea is that speech comes from the automatic response such as pain, anger, joy, fear, suspense etc.

The Ding-Dong Theory was proposed by the German scholar and philologist Max Muller. According to this theory there is a mystical relationship between sound and meaning. This theory was also favoured by Plato and Pythagoras.

It is clear from above discussion that this is a puzzle to solve how and why language began. The language evolved because humans needed it to give

factual information, order, to convey feelings, emotions and to maintain its social contact. (Yule, 20- 24) Human language has certain distinct characteristics. The use of sound signals is the most obvious of them. But this feature is neither unique nor important to human beings. A lot of animals also use sounds for communication and it is not all important because human beings can transfer language to the visual symbols (as in the case of Braille). These characteristics are of little use in distinguishing human communication from animal communication.

Another peculiar characteristic of language is arbitrariness. In the case of animals there is generally apparent relation between the signal and the message, the animal wishes to convey. There is no logical relationship between signal and message. So we can say that although both humans and animals seem to be genetically predisposed to acquire language it seems in human this latent peculiarity can be activated only by exposure to the language. Animals communicate about things which are present. Human beings on the contrary can communicate about things that are absent. This phenomenon is called displacement.

Creativity is another important characteristic which distinguishes human communication from animal communication. Animals have fixed number of messages which are sent in clearly definable circumstances. For example a North American cicada gives only four messages while a male grasshopper has a choice of six. Recent researches conducted on dolphins, birds, and bees have shown that they cannot utter anything they like.

Duality or double articulation is also striking characteristic of human language. Animals using sound signals for communication have a finite set of basic sounds. The number of basic sound varies from species to species. Cows for example have less than ten, foxes have over thirty. Most animals use only one basic sound, occasionally form simple combination of these sounds. So the number of messages is limited to the number of basic sounds. In contrast, human language functions differently. Every language has a set of thirty to forty basic sounds called phonemes.

Patterning is quite close to the phenomenon of duality. Most animal systems of communication comprise a single list of sounds and there is no internal organization within the system. Another remarkable characteristic of human language is the structure of pattern. So far we have seen that human language has some special characteristics which are not unique in humans. Some of these are reciprocity or interchangeability, rapid fading, spontaneous usage, turn - taking, specialisation and complete feedback.

The above discussion brings us to the conclusion that human beings have used language for multiple purposes. Human beings speak same language to one another but there are perceptible differences in their speech. These differences are due to a number of factors such as social class, region, caste, ethnic group, age, sex and so on. The differences are also due to the subject matter and relationship

between the participants. The discipline which studies the role of language in society is known as sociolinguistics.

The word 'literature' is derived from Latin word "literature" which means 'letter or writings'. It generally means 'things made from letters'. Basically literature means anything that is written or printed. But literature is a supreme art. It is the finest and highest art. Since all art is concerned with life, literature too, has life as its subject matter. Literature is nothing but the expression and representation of life. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to give a precise definition of literature. Literature is as vast and complex as life which too, is indefinable. Our task gets more difficult when one uses the term literature in a vague and generalized sense. The various religious and political organizations claim to have their own literature. They assert that one must go through their literature to understand their ideology. Communists have their own literature. In fact none of these may be called literature – a book on Theology, astronomy, jurisprudence and economics, a book of cooking, railway time table. But the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Wordsworth and the short stories of Premchand are examples of literature.

Other writings cater to the taste of particular group or individual whereas literature pleases and satisfies all and sundry. Literature deals with things of general human interest. The chief purpose of literature is to provide aesthetic pleasure and delight. The purpose of other writings is to give information and knowledge. Literature serves a much higher and nobler purpose. Since all art is concerned with life, literature too, is the representation of life. Literature is an excellent art. No art, auditory or visual has the power and beauty of literature. It is the finest art. Since art, according to *Encyclopedia* is the imitation of life, literature is chiefly and exclusively concerned with life. Since literature deals with life the best it is an art par excellence. One thing should be very clear in mind that literature is not morality, religious sermon. It has no ethical or exhortative aim. It has got nothing to do with pontifical attitude.

The chief purpose of literature is to provide joy, offer delight and above all furnish us with an aesthetic satisfaction. Literature rouses our emotional mooring, social awareness and sense of propriety coupled with dignity. Literature provides a rich and fertile field for the expression or substantiation of imagination. In short, literature is the imitation of life through the medium of language. Literature has distinctive characteristics which can be discerned through specific non-literary work. There are some important qualities which make a piece of writing or work as literary.

A great piece of literature is universal and immortal. Time, vagaries of nature have no effect on it. It has a permanent value and lasting effect. According to Aristotle, literature indicates universal element i.e. what is true for all times and ages and in particular of the main events, customs, cultures and manners of an age. To quote John Bailey, it must be at once individual and universal. Take an example

from Sanskrit, Greek, Latin or any literature of the world. The messages contained in great literature are universal. They make no distinction between caste and creed, between colour and complexion, between locale and plane. Literature is purely a product of imagination. It is a special feature of literature. Literature transports us to different world unlike this. It is imagination which helps to draw multiple meanings in a piece of literature.

Man is a creature of feelings and emotions. Everybody has feelings and emotion but these feelings are common and low. A literary artist has deeper, sometimes uncommon human feelings. He elevates, heightens, and intensifies feelings. Diction plays significant role. It is a supreme element. A great artist takes full care that there should be a perfect and fine artistic blending between the theme and treatment, the substance and style. A great writer takes care in selecting the suitable words and arranging them in proper order. No theme is new in literature. Every great writer has been using the same theme drawn from life since literature is basically concerned with life. No literary artist can ignore life. He has to choose his subject matter, his theme, his view only after observing and considering all aspects of life. (Banarjee, 4-5)

Many people think that the study of literature is a wastage of time in this age of science and technology. But literature is a vital record of what and how men have seen life, what are the expressions about it. It is the interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the mind of interpreter. We turn to literature because we care for life and because we are interested in its varied aspects and because we like to study human behaviour and action. The study of literature is profitable as well as necessary to live happily in the age of gadgets and gizmos. It is only the study of literature which teaches us the art of living. According to Tolstoy literature has two important qualities related to human beings in the world. The first question is who are they and next how they should live in this world. The answer to this question that literature is vital and indispensable because it is directly and chiefly concerned with life.

Literature in fact, is reflection of the social and political life of the age in which it was written. It depicts and describes the age. Literature is a kind of documents containing the history- social and political of time. The study of literature enlightens us about culture, tradition, habits, manners and customs. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Restoration comedies, Pope's "the Rape of the Lock" are realistic pictures of the contemporary life. Literature has a wide range, it takes us to new places and different times. It broadens our mental horizon. The study of literature leads to self-discovery. We find ourselves and our life in character. The study of literature opens our thinking power and meditative skills. It enlightens our imaginative power too.

There are different purposes for the study of literature. Most people study it for pleasure, entertainment and pastime. The study of literature enriches our knowledge and stock of words. The creation of literature is the creation of exceptionally, powerful personality. He is bound to exert powerful influence on the readers' mind. Moreover, every great writer brings an absolutely new thing to the world. Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, T.S Eliot and W.B Yeats are authentic sources of knowledge and information. From the above discussion it is clear that literature is nothing but a record of authentic, credible material. There is no need to elaborate the past discussion. Literature helps in cultural enrichment, language development and personal development.

It has been made amply clear in the above discussion that language and literature are two entirely different terms. While language is a set of rules and arrangement of words to express our ideas literature is the expression of thoughts with the help of language. Literature is the creation of work in the particular language while language is a mode of expression of thoughts by means of articulate sounds. There can be as many literatures as languages.

There are some more differences between language and literature. Language is a medium to communicate thoughts and feelings but literature is enrichment of emotion, inner feelings, life and the world. Language comprises sounds, words and sentences. Literature, on the contrary is the study of written composition. There will be no literature without language. Language is the basic unit of literature. Thus language shapes literature. Literature has several forms like prose, verse, drama, fiction, biography and autobiography while language is its mode of expression. All these literary forms are written in language. Thus literature is a record of human, noble and powerful thoughts which are expressed by means of words.

Indeed, it is a presupposed fact that deep knowledge of language is essential to be able to appreciate and enjoy literature. We can comprehend and comment on a piece of literature if our knowledge is sound and profound. Language is a structure and foundation of literature. It is a dress of ideas and thoughts. It is a tool to use with linguistic problems and literal explanation. Before teaching literature to young students a special training of language skills must be imparted. Most of students do not enjoy literature because they do not understand text owing to poor vocabulary and sentence pattern. As a result students lose interest in studying literature. A student should never neglect the study of language in order to enjoy and comprehend the world of literature. To have command over language one should equally focus on grammar, word power, formation of words and sentence structure or pattern. Without proper and thorough knowledge of language, one never expects to enjoy literature fully. A proficiency in the language is therefore, very helpful in appreciation and enjoyment of literature.

The foregoing discussion has brought to the conclusion that language and literature have umbilical relation. The two cannot be separated and conceived in isolation. While literature is the artistic record of life, language is its medium or tool. A literary work is characterized by universality and permanence. Thousands of fictions are published all over the world but only a few of them are literary works while the rest are non-literary. A literary work is made authentic through its suggestiveness and durability. Longinus considers sublimity as the highest quality of literature. He mentioned the great ideas, sustained passion, rhetorical figures, noble diction and above all the unity and singularity of organization through language. A living language is constantly growing and developing. In the same way a good and a great literature is evolving constantly and it is of lasting value.

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