



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Significance Of Literature In Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a mirror of society can never be confined to academics alone. Literature has diverse roles in contemporary culture and society. Literature is infinite and prevalent in multiple modes everywhere in today's society. Whether it is studied in the classroom, read for pleasure or purpose, literature is a central part of many lives. It offers not only a chance to enlighten a person, but it also gives the chance to broaden one's horizons and perspectives. Literature reflects humanity; it can nurture empathy and philosophy of mind, defamiliarize reality to stimulate familiar perception and reflect on human nature and in turn promote social change. The most notable aspect of Literature is its ability to transgress i.e. go beyond a set boundary or limit. The present paper will show the role of literature in contemporary society. With literature there is always a new reality to discover for Art is the greatest human expression. Thus literature has transcended time and is still an integral part of human life while forming critical components of today's class room curriculum.

Key words: literature, beyond, role, society

Introduction: Literature, derived from the Latin term *littera* meaning "letter," encompasses any written work, from books and magazines to pamphlets. It faithfully reflects human experiences through creative expression, often blending them into harmonious forms such as drama, essays, fiction, and nonfiction. Literature serves as a medium for recording life's journeys, transforming ordinary language into something vivid and profound, as noted by Terry Eagleton: "Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech." (p2)

Thomas Warton, an early historian of English poetry, viewed literature as a faithful recorder of its era, preserving customs, manners, and the history of civilization, particularly chivalry. Literature is often regarded as a mirror of society, reflecting its values and evolving over time and across cultures. Ezra Pound described great literature as "language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree."

Beyond the pleasure of words, literature elevates experiences, offering both affirmation and criticism of cultural values. It appears in various forms—poetry, prose, sonnets, novels, haikus, and short stories—all unified by the exploration of ideas. These ideas inspire, provoke thought, and deepen understanding, allowing readers to learn about the past, present, and future, while also uncovering truths about the human condition.

"Develop an interest in life as you see it; the people, things, literature, music-the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls, and interesting people. Forget yourself."—Henry Miller

Literature provides role models, offers insights into unfamiliar experiences, and connects readers emotionally. It reflects human joys and struggles while preserving cultural practices and history. For instance, in *The Other Presence*, Nyathi illustrates traditional African methods of food preservation: "...today what hung there was not clothes but meat cut into long strings, salted, and dried to last for mourning rituals" (p. 130). Such works exemplify how literature informs, inspires, and bridges the gap between history and modern life.

Literature transcends ages

"While thought exists, words are alive and literature becomes an escape, not from, but into living."—Cyril Connolly

The advent of writing marked a significant step in human civilization, enabling the transmission of knowledge, ideas, events, and emotions across time and space. Literature transcends the limitations of a single lifetime, breaking barriers of geography, time, and perspective. Great works like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by Ved Vyas and Valmiki, as well as holy texts like the *Bible*, *Quran*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, offer timeless moral lessons and guidance during crises.

Through literature, writers achieve immortality, as seen in Homer's epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which provide insights into ancient societies like Troy and Sparta. Literature also captures the essence of its era, from Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci's Renaissance art to Wordsworth's romanticized depiction of nature. It offers readers a window into past civilizations, such as ancient Egypt through hieroglyphics and Greece through its detailed accounts of gods and culture.

Modern literature reflects present-day politics and society while imagining future possibilities, as seen in Orwell's *1984*, which critiques totalitarianism and emphasizes freedom of thought. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and its sequels explore the cultural impact of colonialism on Africa, while Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* highlights the hardships of the Great Depression, inspiring social awareness and change.

Literature preserves the voices of those who walked before us, enabling us to learn from history and appreciate diverse cultures. Its power lies in its ability to provoke thought, inspire reform, and create movements, making it an enduring force for political and social transformation. Through its eternal words, literature bridges the past, present, and future, connecting humanity across time and space.

Literature promotes social change

Women's literature has a rich history in Western tradition but gained recognition only in the 19th century. Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneering feminist philosopher, is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), where she argued for women's education and envisioned a society based on reason and equality. Her ideas, dismissed in her time, gained prominence with the feminist movement of the 20th century and continue to influence gender equality discourse. Later works like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) explored themes of female autonomy and societal constraints.

The feminist movement, flourishing in the 1960s, challenged patriarchy and gave rise to literature addressing intersectional issues. Writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison delved into the dual oppression of race and gender, following the legacy of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Sojourner Truth's speech *Ain't I a Woman* (1851). The Black experience also found expression in the works of Langston Hughes, whose poem *Let America Be America Again* (1936) questioned the promises of equality, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), which explored racial marginalization.

Literature has long been a battleground for ideas, as illustrated by Heinrich Heine's prophetic words: "Wherever books are burned, human beings are destined to be burned too." Helen Keller echoed this sentiment in her response to the 1933 Nazi book burnings, asserting that ideas cannot be destroyed. The blind writer Helen Keller published an Open Letter to German Students: 'you may burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas those books contain have passed through millions of channels and will go on.'

Engaging with literature fosters critical reflection on society, race, gender, and culture. It helps us understand life, cultivate empathy, and confront injustices, making it a timeless tool for exploring humanity and enriching our perspective on the world.

Connective value of Literature Helps Develop Alternate Perspectives

In the preface to *Nigger of the Narcissus* Joseph Conrad writes, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel- it is before all, to make you see" (Conrad, quoted in Bluestone 1).

Literature serves as a lens through which human behavior, ideas, and emotions can be studied in a safe and controlled way. Stories illustrate moral norms more effectively than mere preaching, allowing readers to mentally place themselves in a character's position. This process enhances empathy and deepens insights into human thoughts and emotions. As Judith Caesar observed, literature raises questions and fosters understanding of complex issues.

By offering a glimpse into diverse cultures, literature expands readers' horizons, making them more accepting of differences and reflective of their own traditions. It mirrors society, allowing readers to explore

the human condition and understand both the world and themselves. E.M. Forster aptly said, "Great literature transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote it."

In modern society, literature provides an outlet for expression and a medium to explore enduring issues like human conflict. Unlike modern media, which often offers quick solutions, literature reveals the true complexity of human struggles, as seen in *The Great Gatsby* or *The Grapes of Wrath*. Novels foster conversations, enabling readers to engage with universal truths.

Works like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveal diverse perspectives on humanity. Whether exploring isolation, cultural conflict, or societal change, these stories offer insights into the moral and cultural values that shape us.

Studying literature connects readers with the cultures, histories, and intellectual movements of its creators. It reflects humanity's collective experiences, offering both inspiration and introspection. As Alfred North Whitehead noted, "It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression." Literature, in its many forms, serves as a timeless mirror and guide to understanding life and our shared human journey.

Literature helps connect the dots

"Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart."—Salman Rushdie

Literature sharpens critical thinking by teaching readers to uncover symbolism and hidden meanings, both in texts and in everyday life. It allows readers to connect characters and themes to real-life situations, offering a window into the author's mind and the political, social, or personal contexts that shaped their work. As Robert Louis Stevenson said, "The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean."

Through literature, we gain insight into human emotions and society. Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* vividly captures the terror, hope, and resilience of a family hiding during the Holocaust, offering a personal lens into the horrors of Nazi Germany. Similarly, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* uses soliloquies and psychological depth to explore themes of ambition and moral corruption, shedding light on human frailties.

By examining the human condition, literature reveals life's complexities, offering both an escape and a profound connection to our shared responsibilities. It opens our eyes to the richness of human experience and helps us better understand ourselves and the world.

Significance in contemporary society

"Literature adds to reality; it enriches life and sharpens the competencies we need," said C.S. Lewis. It reflects society's norms, offering timeless lessons and fostering creativity and imagination. Classical works, like Shakespeare's plays, illuminate universal themes—friendship, enmity, and human flaws—still relevant in the 21st century.

Children's literature, from Aesop's fables to Harry Potter, shapes young minds, teaching morals and inspiring imagination. Authors like Roald Dahl and Mark Twain have enriched countless childhoods through their relatable characters and engaging stories.

For modern individuals, literature offers clarity amid life's dilemmas. Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* teaches acceptance of choices, while *Mending Wall* explores the balance between separation and connection in human relationships. Works like Aristotle's tragedies or Eliot's *The Waste Land* provoke self-reflection, empathy, and spiritual rejuvenation, offering timeless insights into the human condition.

Literature also entertains and engages across generations. Iconic works like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Godfather* connect readers emotionally, while others, like *Dead Poets Society*, remind us that passion, beauty, and love are what make life worth living. As John Milton aptly stated, "A good book is the life-blood of a master spirit," offering a vibrant lens to view the world.

CONCLUSION

"Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it but moulds it to its purpose." -Oscar Wilde

Literature is essential to expanding our knowledge and understanding of the multitude of cultures and history of our existence on earth. It informs the readers of the nature of mankind, the animal world, the huge variety of plants and every other subject imaginable. Literature is a reflection of life itself. Literature provides as an insight into the past and guides us to the future. The ideas, opinions and experiences help a person to live an intellectual life. Literature has the power to shine a light on a society's beliefs and practices. It forces readers to ask questions, start conversations and look for answers, even if one true answer doesn't exist. The themes, characters and lessons in literature are ones that can all be compared to the

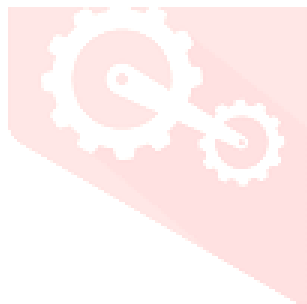
people and events readers see in the real world. In that sense, literature is a reflection of society. Literature is resonance of human emotions.

Literature has brought the birth of many movements and great revolutionary ideas in the past and it has the ability to bring ideas for the upcoming generations to come and it is also for the welfare of the people, literature also enhances the ability to make people understand situation and the understanding of the mind, the surroundings and make them more human, strong, filled with thoughts, emotions, it does help in giving us moral lessons in life and imparts knowledge, virtue, morality and spirituality. And it is believed that words and ideas do change the world and literature within it carries infinite depth of words and gives birth to innumerable ideas to change the world and so I think literature is as important as our life on earth. Literature is ever green and Books never get old. Every idea, every word has different meanings and beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. Literature teaches us to look at life from a different perspective, gives us a reason to think in a different manner and understand our surroundings better, where our thoughts are not confined to the four walls but where our thoughts get wings to create beautiful art through imagination. Instead of preaching moral laws, teachers may facilitate the development of moral reasoning by the training of social skills, that aid moral development

"The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation."—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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