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**LMD1 LECTURES**

**Lecture One**

**I What is Literature?**

* 1. **Introduction**

The quest for a definition of 'literature' is a road that is much traveled, but the point of arrival, if reached, is seldom satisfactory. Most attempted definitions are broad and vague and inevitably evolve over time. In fact, the only thing that is certain about defining literature is that the definition will change. Over time, the concepts of what is literature changed as well. What may be considered ordinary and not worthy of comment in one time period may be considered a literary genius in another

* 1. **Definition of Literature**
		1. **Etymologically**

The word 'Literature' is a derived form of the Latin word (literra, literatura, or literatus) that means: 'writing formed with letters.'

1.2.2 **Definition**

Literature can be defined as a form of art that uses language to express human experiences, emotions, and ideas. It encompasses a wide range of genres, including poetry, fiction, drama, and non-fiction, and is characterized by its aesthetic qualities, such as its use of figurative language, symbolism, and imagery. Literature not only entertains but also informs and enlightens its readers by exploring the complexities of the human condition and the world around us. It has the power to inspire, challenge, and transform us, and serves as a reflection of our shared cultural heritage and values. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), literature is often attributed to "the body of writing on a particular subject (scientific, artistic, etc.) produced in a particular language, country, or age." It is said that literature foregrounds language and uses it in artistic ways. According to Terry Eagleton, literature "transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech." This definition of literature and its relationship to language goes some way toward capturing this relationship, he also adds that "literature is not just any kind of writing, but writing which has a specific function within a given culture" (Eagleton, 2008, p. 3). In other words, literature is not simply a collection of words on a page, but rather a form of cultural expression that reflects and shapes the values and beliefs of a particular society.

As a complex and multifaceted form of art, literature can be understood and interpreted in many different ways.

Spoken or written, Literature is a type of art that uses language to creatively and aesthetically express thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It includes a variety of genres, such as drama, poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and more. Furthermore, literature has the power to entertain, educate, inspire, and challenge readers to think critically about the world surrounding them. It is a crucial tool for maintaining and passing along historical and cultural traditions.

The current definition of literature, particularly for university courses, is that it covers the main genres of poetry, drama, and novel/fiction. Literature can be didactic; it can make us reflect on "the human condition," it can make us enjoy language and beauty, and it can make us think about ourselves and our society. It both reflects ideology and changes ideology, just like it follows generic conventions as well as changing them. A world that can only be seen by reading literature is one that literature creates.

Literature is often seen as an art form that explores the human condition and reflects the society and culture in which it is created. It can be fictional or non-fictional and is often used to communicate complex ideas and themes, such as love, death, morality, and identity.

Literature refers to the practice and profession of writing. It comes from human interest in telling a story. Literature shows us not only what a society is like at a certain age but also what individuals feel about it and how they change it.

**1.2.3 Definition of Literature According to Different Writers and Scholars**

Literature, Ezra Pound says, “is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree,” and according to literary theorist Terry Eagleton, it “transforms and intensifies ordinary language.” according to Iris Murdoch:" literature as “a sort of disciplined technique for arousing certain emotions.” According to Alfred North Whitehead, "The concrete outlook of humanity finds its expression in literature."

For Henry James: "It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature." whereas Lewis: "Literature does more than just describe reality; it also adds to it. In this way, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already turned into by enhancing the necessary competencies that daily life demands and provides. "Literature always anticipates life," said Oscar Wilde."Instead of copying it, it shapes it to suit its needs. The nineteenth century as we understand it was largely created by Balzac". "Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity," said Chesterton, and Forster's definition of literature is very intriguing. “The wonderful thing about great literature is that it changes the reader's perspective of the author's condition”.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum defines literature as "a vehicle for human sympathy and understanding" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 3). She argues that literature has the power to engage our emotions and imaginations, allowing us to empathize with characters and situations that are different from our own.

Literary theorist Wolfgang Iser views literature as a "virtual reality" that readers enter into and actively participate in (Iser, 1978, p. 35). He argues that literature is not a fixed or static object, but rather a dynamic process of meaning-making that requires active engagement from the reader.

Literary critic Harold Bloom defines literature as "the art of our language raised to its highest power" (Bloom, 1995, p. 1). He argues that literature represents the pinnacle of human creativity and achievement, and that great literature has the power to endure and transcend its historical context.

Literary theorist Roland Barthes views literature as a form of writing that resists fixed meanings and interpretations (Barthes, 1977, p. 5). He argues that literature is characterized by its openness and indeterminacy and that it invites readers to actively participate in the process of creating meaning.

Novelist Chinua Achebe defines literature as "a potent medium for articulating the hopes, fears, and aspirations of societies" (Achebe, 1998, p. 59). He argues that literature plays an important role in shaping and reflecting the cultural identity of a people and that it has the power to challenge and transform our understanding of the world.

Literary critic Northrop Frye is emphasizing the vastness and inclusivity of literature with his definition of "the entire body of the written works of a specific language, people, period, etc." suggesting that literature encompasses all written works that arise from a particular cultural or historical context, and thus reflects the diverse range of human experiences and perspectives. At the same time, Frye's definition of literature as "the verbal structure of a culture,"(Frye, 1957, p. 3) emphasizes the importance of literary works as a reflection of cultural values, beliefs, and myths. This suggests that literature is not only a collection of texts but also a way of understanding and interpreting the world around us. By analyzing the verbal structures and narrative techniques of literary works, we can gain insight into the underlying ideologies and worldviews of a particular culture or period. Together, these definitions suggest that literature is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing both the breadth and depth of human experience.

Literary theorist Jacques Derrida views literature as a form of writing that exposes and deconstructs the underlying assumptions and structures of language (Derrida, 1976, p. 13). He argues that literature reveals the paradoxes and contradictions that are inherent in all forms of communication and that it challenges us to question the foundations of our knowledge and beliefs.

Literary historian Franco Moretti defines literature as "a way of knowing the world through texts" (Moretti, 2005, p. 1). He argues that literature provides a unique perspective on the world and that it allows us to explore and understand social and cultural phenomena in ways that other forms of knowledge cannot.

These definitions of literature by great authors and scholars all highlight various facets of it and demonstrate the variety of contexts in which it can be effective. They demonstrate the diverse ways in which scholars have conceptualized literature, emphasizing its role as a cultural artifact, a tool for deconstruction and questioning, and a means of exploring the world around us, and how it can be understood as an art form, a mode of resistance.

**1.3 The Effects of Literature on a Society**:

The effects of literature on society can be both positive and negative. Because of this, the famous philosophers Aristotle and Plato disagree about how it affects society. Plato was the one who started the idea of written dialogue. Because he believed poetry to be immoral since he was a moralist, he disapproved of it. He believed that poetry was founded on false ideas, whereas philosophy was based on reality and the truth. Poetry, according to Plato, "inspires unfavorable emotions in society. According to him, poetry should be censored from adults and children for fear of lasting detrimental consequences" (Leitch & McGowan). Aristotle, on the other hand, considers literature of all kinds as a crucial part of children’s upbringing. Poetry, according to him, "brings us closer to reality. It teaches, warns, and shows us the consequences of bad deeds", he added in his writings. He held the opinion that poetry need not elicit unfavorable emotions. (Read Aristotle's justification for poetry) Therefore, the relationship of literature with society is of utter importance. It might have a few negative impacts through guided studying, which we can avoid.

**1.4 Why do we read Literature?**

People read literature for a variety of reasons, which may vary depending on their individual interests and preferences. Here are some common reasons why people read literature:

* Entertainment: Many people read literature simply for enjoyment, as a way to

escape from the stresses of daily life and immerse themselves in a world of imagination and creativity.

* Education: Literature can be a valuable source of knowledge and insight, providing readers with new perspectives on the world around them and deepening their understanding of history, culture, and human experience.
* Pleasure: Reading for pleasure is one of the main reasons people enjoy literature, as it provides an opportunity for escapism, entertainment, and enjoyment.
* Relaxation: Literature can also provide a sense of relaxation and stress relief, allowing readers to take a break from the pressures of daily life.
* Knowledge: Reading literature can provide readers with a deeper understanding of history, culture, and human experience, allowing them to gain insights into the traditions, customs, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the age in which it is written.
* Empathy: Reading literature can help readers develop empathy for others by immersing them in the lives and experiences of fictional characters. This can be particularly valuable in helping readers understand and connect with people from different backgrounds and cultures.
* Creativity: Literature can inspire readers to develop their own creative skills by exposing them to different styles and techniques of writing, as well as challenging them to think critically and imaginatively.
* Self-reflection: Literature can also provide readers with a space for self-reflection and introspection, as they relate to the characters and themes of the works they read and consider how they might apply these insights to their own lives.

Overall, reading literature can be a deeply enriching and rewarding experience, offering readers a window into different worlds and perspectives, as well as a means of personal growth and development.