

**UNIT
2****THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE, OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, AND QUALITIES OF GOOD LITERATURE, APPRECIATION OF A LITERARY WORK****: STRUCTURE :****2.0 Objectives****2.1 Introduction****2.2 Why Study Literature****2.2.1 Benefits of Literature****2.2.2 Functions of Literature****2.2.3 Why we Study Literature?****2.4 Qualities of Good Literature****2.5 Appreciation of Literary Works (How to read a literary work)****2.5.1 Appreciating Poetry****2.5.2 Appreciation of Fiction****2.5.3 Critical Approaches for Appreciation of Literary Works****2.6 Key Words****2.7 Check Your Progress****2.8 Let Us Sum Up****2.9 Books Suggested****Answers**

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall;

- discuss the functions of literature and the objective of study of literature,
- discuss qualities of good literary works,
- learn how to read and appreciate literary works,
- look at practical examples of appreciation of literary pieces/ poetry and other literary texts briefly,
- deal with various critical approaches to appreciate literary works. Sociological, biographical, formalist, feminist, psycho-analytical, archetypal, etc.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The word “literature” in a broad sense refers to all printed or written material. Oral tradition of literature existed before writing came into existence. Orality had always been an important part of literature. Even today, plays are performed on the stage and poetry is recited before audiences. Parents delight their children with stories and poems.

The basic nature of literature is aesthetic pleasure it provides to the readers. Literature is imaginative and fictional. It has no practical purpose like science, history or philosophy. Pure literature is called literature of power as its function is to move and touch the hearts of the readers. Unlike the literature of knowledge, it does not provide knowledge or information to the readers. The language of literature is different from everyday language and scientific language. It is charged with cultural nuances. The language of literature is full of ambiguity as it contains multiple layers and shades of meaning.

Literature has many functions like providing entertainment, social or political function, ideological function, moral function, educational function, linguistic function, cultural function, historical function, etc. Literature helps reader grow emotionally and intellectually. It does provide objective base for knowledge and understanding. It links its readers with broader cultural, philosophical, and religious world. It helps people in developing sensibility and compassion for all living creatures.

Literature also makes us aware of the beauty around us. It teaches us to appreciate beauty of nature and the beauty of life in general. It also takes us into the depth of human nature and its intricacies. In our real life, we may know limited number of people. Literature brings us closer to broader and larger human world. Literature is a vital record of what men have seen, experienced and thought from time immemorial and therefore, it provides us the wide range of knowledge about the life and the world.

2.2 WHY STUDY LITERATURE

2.2.1 Benefits of Literature :

The study of arts and literature today is looked down upon as irrelevant and useless. This is a general belief in the society about art and literature, as arts graduates and post graduates have a fewer job opportunities and are not seen as making successful careers. Even though the prevalent belief may not be wrong, it indicates the fact that we are more concerned about the money rather than life. No doubt, science and technology have practical functions and they certainly play an important role in our life and society but one must not forget that literature serves as a gateway to expanding our knowledge and understanding of the world.

Even after thousands of years, why do the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the plays of Shakespeare appeals to us ? Why are we still enchanted by beautiful music, movies and discourse on the *Ramayana* and *Bhagvat Purana* ? There are benefits of literature which make us better human beings by ensuring that we develop humanistic and liberal attitude.

The first important benefit of literature is that it opens for us the beauties around us. It makes us see things which we have missed or ignored. It expands the horizon of mind and makes us more sensitive to things we come across in our life. Our heart leaps up when we behold a rainbow in the sky. We become sensitive towards beautiful songs of birds, murmur of streams and the roar of the oceans. This sensitivity and curiosity enriches our lives profoundly.

Reading of literature also expands our critical skills and the skills of reading between the lines. Literature and history are interconnected. Literature enables us to know about past, the people in the past and events that took place in those days. History records what had happened while literature looks at the past events from imaginative point of view. This makes literature more real than history.

Through literature, we travel to different countries of the world and get transported to different times. Thus literature proves itself to be a sort of a time machine that takes us into past or future. Literature also makes us appreciate other cultures and beliefs. Through the study of literature, we can become more tolerant and liberal towards other religious groups and their cultures. Acceptances and appreciation of different views and culture create truly liberal and democratic world. All kinds of literature addressed human nature and conditions which affect all people. We learn to accept human imperfections and weakness.

In short, the study of literature has civilizing effect on people. Education creates educated professionals but they often lack humanistic attitude. Tolstoy used the term 'educated barbarians' for such people. Sympathy is intellectual; empathy is emotional. Literature evokes empathy and other noble feelings in its readers.

Literature also teaches us to react to different situations in life. In our real life, we do not face all kind of situations, but in literature we come across all kinds of problems that the characters of the literary works face. When we read these works, we identify ourselves with the characters and undergo these situations vicariously. This act as a therapy called "Bibliotherapy". It is the process of using books (literature) to tackle mental disorders and problems. The benefits of literature are endless, universal and eternal.

2.2.2 Functions of Literature :

Functions of literature have been debated since ancient times. Though various thinkers and critics differed about the functions of literature, they all agreed one point that the basic function of literature is to entertain the readers. The nature of literature is related to the function of literature. All objects are used according to their inherent nature. For example, poetry is full of emotions and imagination, and therefore, its primary function is to move the heart of the readers. This act of touching the heart provides aesthetic pleasure to the reader. This pleasure is of higher nature which is quite closer to spiritual pleasure.

In ancient Greece, literature, philosophy and religion existed together. Greek poetry was inseparable from moral teaching. Minstrels were teachers with the function of pleasing the audience. Plato was interested in art insofar as its influence was beneficial in moulding men and women into good citizens. He opposed poetry because all arts were imitations (mimesis), thrice removed from truth. He also rejected poetry on the ground that it excited inferior human emotions, leading him to immoral life.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* used the word 'mimesis' for art but with a difference. For him, imitation was representation of life in literature. He said that literature is more realistic than history as it depicts not what is, but what

may or should be. He said that tragedy led to catharsis, emotions of pity and fear in the hearts of the spectators, freeing them from these harmful emotions. Aristotle emphasized the cathartic value of literature.

Horace, a great Roman critic, believed that the aim of poetry is “to instruct and to delight”. He said that poetry is sweet (*dulce*) and useful (*utile*). Longinus was the first romantic critic who said that a work of literature transports the readers into the world of passionate experience. For him, sublimity is the greatest of all literary virtues. Great literature, according to Longinus, appeals to imagination, not reason. Sublimity lifts readers closer to great mindedness of God.

Sir Philip Sidney, a great Elizabethan poet and sonneteer, in his work *Apology for Poetry* (1595) maintains that “delightful teaching is the end of poesy”. He also voiced the opinion of Longinus when he said that the chief function of literature is to “move”. John Dryden, the next great critic after Philip Sidney, asserted that aim of the writers is not to teach but to please. De Quincey made distinction between two types of literature : Literature of knowledge and literature of power. The function of the former is to teach, the function of the latter is to move”.

Romantic poets focused on imaginations and emotions in their poetry. They took poetry as something dealing with eternal and universal truth. William Wordsworth called poetry “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Coleridge in his book *Biographia Literaria* discussed the role of Esemplastic Imagination which “dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate”. For Goethe, the highest function of the art is “to represent”.

Matthew Arnold in his book, *The Study of Poetry* glorifies the role of poetry. He calls poetry “the criticism of life”. According to Arnold, poetry is an “application of ideas of life”. He says that poetry teaches us how to live. He holds the view that “poetry of revolt against moral ideas is poetry of revolt against life”.

T. S. Eliot dismisses social function of poetry. He says that poet should erase any trace of his personality from poetry. He says, “Poetry is not turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion. It is not the expression of personality but escape from personality.” Modern critics stressed the study of text it's form, style, language etc. Marxist critics focused on social relevance of literary texts.

After discussing the history of poets and critics and their views on functions of literature, let us now discuss the chief functions of literature.

1. The main function of literature is to entertain and give pleasure to the readers, and to heighten their awareness of certain aspects of life. Literature provides aesthetic pleasure which is quite different from material or physical pleasure.
2. Literature also has a subsidiary function of propaganda. The writer of propaganda is more concerned about ideas, ideology or emotions. The focus of the writer of propaganda is to communicate to his readers his attitude towards life and the world. John Ruskin's economic ideas presented in his works can be cited as an example. Charles Dickens

employed indirect method of fiction to propagate his views on industrialism, poverty, crime, schooling etc.

3. Another subsidiary function of literature is 'release' which refers to the release of pent-up forces in the personality of the writer. It acts as purgation (catharsis) for the writers as well as the readers.
4. Writers also provide "escape" from grim realities of life and the world. It provides escape from boredom and monotony of life. Great literature usually helps the readers to escape from trivial reality.
5. Judith Langer in "Envisioning Literature" says "literature makes us better thinkers. It moves us to see the multi sidedness of situations and therefore expands the breadth of our own visions, moving us towards dreams and solutions we might not otherwise imagined".
6. Literature helps readers develop a sense of individuality and creativity.
7. Literature also develops enduring values like integrity, compassion, loyalty and integrity in the readers.
8. There is an intimate connection between literature and life. Infact life itself is the subject matter of literature. It is the expression of the life through the medium of language. When we study literature, we understand life in its broader perspectives.
9. Literature is a vital record of what men have seen, experienced and thought about life. By reading literature, we have access to experience and thoughts of other people in the world.
10. Literature also provides us a deep understanding of human nature. In our real life, we meet people in a limited number and know them quite superficially. Literature takes us into deeper recesses of human mind. This gives us a profound understanding of human psychology.
11. The function of literature is not to teach but to delight. However, great literature is always connected with human values, virtues and morality. Literature teaches us how to live meaningfully. When we study a work of literature, we come across positive and negative aspects of life. Literature does not preach morality directly but it also stands for the truth, love and other human virtues. Quite often, the good suffers in literary works but it wins our heart and carves its place in our memory forever.

2.2.3 Why We Study Literature?

There are many subjects that deal with specific area of knowledge. For example, economics with human wants, demands, supply, money etc; Physics deals with physical and material world; Chemistry with chemicals; and Psychology deals with human psyche. Literature is the only subject that deals with life, the external and inner world and society. It deals with all subjects of human world, human mind and human society. There are many limitations in human life such as time, place and way of thinking. Literature transcends all these barriers.

The question is why we study literature is often debated and some people say that study of literature has no practical value. It is true that study

of literature has no practical purpose like science, medicine, engineering, geography and so on have. There are flimsy and vague boundaries of literature because it is all encompassing. Literature enables us to know the history of a nation's spirit. It deals with past and works with present envisioning future. It appeals to all five senses, making us experience the beauty of the world around us.

We can learn about past history, socio-economic and cultural background of nation through their literary works like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Mahabharata*. We get insight into human minds and society as literature conveys thoughts, motives and emotions. Great poets like Ved Vyas or Shakespeare present us with panoramic view of human mind and human weakness.

Comedy and satire make us laugh by ridiculing and exposing human weaknesses. Tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear, purging away these emotions and freeing the human mind from these harmful emotions.

Literature allows us to experience the culture and beliefs of other nations which we would probably never visit. We learn to appreciate people as they are, with their beliefs, knowledge and distinct traits. Great literature requires profound understanding of the human world and human minds. There are hidden meanings in literature which requires deep analysis and unfolding the layers that lie hidden therein. This helps us develop analytical and critical mind. We also learn to appreciate the contributions of literature to the history of mankind.

We are all surrounded by unsung tales of noble deeds and sacrifices. When we read folk literature and ballads, our lives become enriched and we learn to appreciate the common folk and their noble actions. Through the reading of literature, we learn to develop empathy for those with whom we differ. Literature provides us with space for those who have been neglected, deprived and marginalized. When we read the Black literature, the Dalit literature and Woman writings, we can understand their sufferings and develop empathy for them. We experience and share the agonies of Richard Wright by reading “Black Boy” or Om Prakash Valmiki by reading “Joothan”.

Literature is both personal as well as communal (in the sense of we as a part of the community) experience. We always discover a new reality in literature. It acts as a tool of self-discovery. Literature operates at many different levels. It has prompted many social and political changes in the society and the world. Literature deals with ideas that create revolution in the social and political spheres all over the world.

2.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of literature enables students to immerse themselves in the world they have never seen or experienced before. There are several objectives of the study of literature which are inter-connected. They provide overall understanding of literature and help us develop a sense of appreciation of literary works. Let us discuss some important objectives of the study of literature.

1. **Experience Pleasure** : The first and for most objective of study of literature is to experience pleasure through the reading of literature. Teachers can help students in enjoying literary works by highlighting the aesthetic aspects of these works.
2. **Learn to Appreciate** : Literature requires critical appreciation and, therefore, students must learn how to appreciate the literary works. First of all, a close reading is necessary. No cursory reading can produce proper understanding of literary pieces. Students of literature must respond to the words, grasp the ideas and articulate their emotional responses to the characters and situations. They should examine the plot, characters, setting, ideas, point of view, tone, theme, humour, irony, symbolism, imagery, rhythm, metres, rhyme in the literary works for a better understanding of these works. They should also understand and examine various critical approaches employed by the author such as Marxist, Feminist, and Psychoanalytical. Archetypal etc.
3. **Promote Empathy** : Empathetic attitude in the students of literature or readers is very necessary for a better understanding of literary works. Empathy is emotional attitude that helps readers to experience oneness with character.
4. **Educate Students in Artistry** : Students of literature should learn to use language in an artistic manner. This is possible if academic environment is provided to them to develop their critical faculties. Through the study of literature, they can understand other cultures and people of different countries. The knowledge of various cultures makes them more liberal, secular and tolerant.
5. **Encourage Research** : Students of literature need to learn basics of research, analysis, literary theories and criticism. They need to develop intellectual flexibility, creativity and cultural literacy. They should be familiar with the classics in literature and other representative literary and cultural texts.
6. **Create Connection** : Literary works are not isolated pieces of literature. Literature is criticism of life, and thus it is connected with all human beings, society, morality, religion and human mind. It reflects how the world works, and why and how all human beings are connected. Literature fosters human relationship by depicting commonness among all human beings across time and place.

2.4 QUALITIES OF GOOD LITERATURE

There are no fixed standards for good literature but there are some characteristics that make literature enduring and appealing beyond time and geographical boundaries. Classic literature is based on real life. It is not mere fancy. It offers true picture of society and culture. It remains relevant universally and eternally. Great works deal with political, social and cultural issues. They deal with the eternal themes like love, war, religion, nature and humanity.

There are eight literary standards of good literary works.

1. **Artistry** : A good work of literature is always artistic and aesthetically appealing. It appeals to our sense of beauty. A great writer should be basically a great artist. John Keats said, “A thing of beauty is a joy forever”. A good literary piece is a thing of beauty and its appeal is eternal and universal.
2. **Intellectual Beauty** : A great literary work should be intellectual beauty that stimulates thinking. It makes us realize the fundamental truths of life, society, nature and the world. Intellectual elements are the elements of thought or ideas. Sometimes when intellectual elements dominate the work of art, its aesthetic appeal is reduced. Therefore, intellectual element should be balanced with aesthetic beauty and aesthetic appeal.
3. **Suggestiveness** : The word suggestive means “tending to suggest” “evocative” and “stimulating further thought”. “Suggestiveness” is a literary quality that appeals to our emotions and stirs our imagination. It evokes visions beyond our routine life experiences. Good literature is always suggestive as it employs emotive language. Emotive language expresses feelings and emotions and also arouses feelings and emotions in the readers.
4. **Spiritual Value** : Spiritual value in literature creates permanent appeal because it is inner foundation of human mind. Spirituality is not morality but a truly spiritual person is always moral. Spiritual values makes men better, more human and liberal minded. Great literature reflects spiritual values that transcend physical world. The great epics of the world possess profound spiritual values which make them perpetually appealing.
5. **Permanence** : A great literary work transcends time and place. Its appeal is eternal and it can be read again and again. Each reading unfolds fresh and new meaning and insights. A great book owes its greatness to the greatness of the personality of its author. A genius is synonymous with freshness and originality. A great book shows the author's originality of outlook upon the world and life. John Milton rightly said that, “A good book is the precious life–blood of master spirit.”
6. **Universality** : A good literature has universal appeal. It is not confined to any particular place or geographical territories. A great literary work is both timely and timeless. It is relevant for analysis at any point in time and at any place. Great literature deals with universal human feelings, thoughts and issues. It remains relevant to all the people all over the world because it deals with fundamental truth of human life and universal conditions. When we read Shakespeare's plays, they appeal to us profoundly because they deal with permanent and universal human problems.
7. **Style** : Style is the manner in which the author presents his world view. Style is not merely a technical thing. It is the part and parcel of the writer's personality. As Carlyle said, “Style is not the coat of the writer

but his skin". A great writer's style is original, authentic and appropriate to content of his writing. Style reflects the intellectual, spiritual and artistic growth of the writer.

8. **Authenticity** : Authenticity is one of the most important characteristics of good literature. Originality does not mean newness but it means genuineness. A great work of art draws its life directly from the personality and experience of the author. The foundation of great literary work is sincerity to oneself and one's own experiences. Genuineness and authenticity of experience is the true test of great literature.

2.5 APPRECIATION OF LITERARY WORK (HOW TO READ A LITERARY WORK)

2.5.1 Appreciation of Poetry :

Appreciation of poetry requires some basic knowledge of literary device, prosody, rhyme and diction. Poetry possesses certain elements and aspects and, therefore, we can look at the poem from different angles. Appreciation of poetry is an attempt to tell others what we have felt and experienced while reading it closely.

The most important way of appreciating poetry is to focus our attention on the text of the poem. Text is a product of poet reflected in the use of language in the poem. Words have both meanings and sounds. Words also become the part of grammatical structures. We talk about sounds, meanings and structure in the poems while appreciating poetry.

Textual analysis of the poem can be made at three levels.

1. **Phonological Level** : At this level we study patterns of sounds and rhythm like alterations, assonance, rhyme and meter.
2. **Structural Level** : At structural level, we study grammatical items and structure.
3. **Semantic–Stylistic Level** : At this level we study, the forms and patterns of words in terms of their meanings and use. Semantic stylistic level analysis refers to parallels, contrasts; similes, metaphors, personification, imagery, irony, paradox etc. It also includes the study of literary forms song, lyrics, sonnet, ode, elegy, drama, narration etc.

Loud reading of a poem is the best way of catching its musical qualities. When we read aloud, we can feel its rhythm. To analyze rhythm, we count syllables, note the stresses and understand rhymes and metres. Some poems are written to fit specific structural requirements.

Stress and rhythm are essential elements of poetry. Stress is a term we use to emphasise a syllable or syllables. Stress occurs in vowel sound. A syllable is formed by the combination of consonant and vowel before or after. For example, the word 'bus' has one syllable but the word 'busy' has two syllables (bi–zi). A word with a single syllable is called monosyllabic; a word with two syllables is called disyllabic. Almost every English word carries stress except structural words like, the, of, and, was etc.

To find out rhythmic patterns of a poem, first of all we need to mark stressed and unstressed syllables in each line of the poem. These patterns are divided into feet disyllabic and trisyllabic (two and three syllables). Let us have a look at the important metrical patterns in English Prosody.

- 1. Iambic :** It is a foot with unstressed syllable followed by stressed. It has a rising rhythm. E.g.

U U U U

Again / deny / begin / idea

U–unstressed syllable, Indicate stress

- 2. Trochai :** It is a disyllabic foot with stressed syllable followed by unstressed. It has a falling rhythm.

U U U U

Power / beauty / reason / never

- 3. Spondee :** in this foot, both the syllable is stressed. Spondee can be used in a line but it cannot create a whole line in a stanza of a poem because due to stressed, syllables, it lacks rhythm.

For Eg. Both Stood

- 4. Pyrrhic :** where both the syllables are unstressed (u u)

- 5. Anapestic :** It is a trisyllabic foot with two unstressed syllables followed by stressed.

uu

For eg. Disagree

- 6. Dactylic :** This is a tri syllabic foot with stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.

The names of meters are based on the number of feet in each line of the poem. For example,

One foot : monometer

Two foot : diameter

Three feet : trimester

Four feet : tetrameter

Five feet : pentameter

Six feet : hexameter

Seven feet : heptameter

Eight feet : octameter

In English structure, blank verse is usually an iambic pentameter without rhymes. Rhymes occur between words at the end of successive lines.

e.g. A thing of beauty is joy forever :

its loveliness increases : it will never

pass into nothingness.....

– *John Keats 'Endymion'*

Rhyme is a correspondence of sounds of similar pronunciation at the end of lines. E.g. see/me, ray/stray/ ringing/ singing/ single rhyme is called 'masculine', while double rhyme is called 'feminine'.

Stanza patterns in English are as follows :

Couplet : Two lines

Triplet : Three lines

Quatrain : Four Lines

Rhyme Royal : A stanza of seven iambic pentameter.

Ottava Rima : A stanza of eight iambic pentameter

Spenserian stanza : A stanza of eight iambic pentameter with a line of twelve syllables at the end.

Rhyme pattern is marked as in the example given below.

Pipa's Song

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| The Year's at the spring | A |
| And day's at the morn; | B |
| Morning's at Seven | C |
| The hillside's dew-pearled; | D |
| The lark's on the wing; | A |
| The snail's on the thorn; | B |
| God's in his heaven | C |
| All's night with the world ! | D |

In this short beautiful poem by Robert Browning, 'spring' rhymes with 'wing', 'morn' with 'thorn', 'seven' with 'heaven' and 'pearled' with 'world'. So the rhyme scheme is ABCD, ABCD. Rhymes make the poem musical. There are also literary devices that influence the sounds of the poem.

1. **Alliteration** : It is a representation of initial consonant sounds in a string of words.

e.g. The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free...

S.T. Coleridge : The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

2. **Assonance** : Assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds especially in stressed syllables. When the same vowel sound is repeated in the words used at the end of verse lines, but not the consonants used in them, it is called assonance.

e.g. grave-fate-/time-child/ Tendered, remembered

3. **Onomatopoeia** : Here the words imitate the sounds.

e.g Grawl, murmer, bang, howl, roar, crash, snap etc.

In poetry words are full of condensed meaning. Poets use figurative language to connect with the readers. They create new meanings of the language people use in their communication. They use emotive language

that has multi layered meanings. These meanings come to the sensitive readers with fresh association and suggestions. Poets use some literary device like simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, irony, paradox etc to build a bridge of understanding with reader.

1. **Simile** : Simile is a comparison using words such as ‘like’ ‘as’ “as_____as”
E.g. He is as brave as lion”
2. **Metaphor** : It makes an implied comparison between two dissimilar things.
e.g. My love is a red red rose.
3. **Personification** : It is when an intimate object is given human qualities.
E.g. Death is not proud, though some have called thee.
Mighty and dreadful. – *John Donne*
4. **Imagery** : Imagery presents sense experience to the readers’ imagination. Poetic imagery is often visual. It can be aural, one that appeals to the sense of hearing. The poet may appeal to the sense of smell, touch and taste.
5. **Symbol** : A thing that represents idea or quality such as white color symbolizes purity. Symbols carry cultural significance also. Symbolism was a movement led by famous Irish Poet W. B. Yeats.
6. **Paradox** : It is a statement in which two opposite ideas are out together in a seemingly self–contradictory way.
7. **Irony** : Irony refers to what a poet says and what he really suggests. It is often the opposite if what he says.
Here are important suggestions regarding how to improve poetry :
 1. Read the poem several times with deep concentration
 2. Make notes in the margins of the poem
 3. Focus on words and look up words you do not recognize. Use standard dictionary and find relevant meanings because a poet uses words in a very different manner
 4. Identify the forms of poems like lyric, sonnet, free verse etc.
 5. Read the poem loudly paying attention to the rhyme of each line.
 6. Check repetition and rhymes in the poem. Understand the stanza pattern and rhymes carefully.
 7. Look for the literary devices like simile, metaphor, and personification.
 8. Scan the stanza and find out metrical pattern of the poem.
 9. Sum up the poem in your own words.
 10. Analyze the title of the poem
 11. Identify the speaker in the poem
 12. Discuss the situation presented in the poem

13. Discuss the setting of the poem
14. Determine the theme of the poem
15. Identify the concrete images in the poem
16. Read about the poet, his background the time period when the poem was written.

Critical Appreciation of 'Bright Star' by John Keats

Bright Star

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

This is one of the most beautiful and meaningful sonnets by John Keats. It was written in 1819 and revised in 1820. John Keats died at a young age of 25 years. The poem is a Shakespearean sonnet divided into three quatrains and a couplet at the end. The poem seems to be addressed to Bright star and the lady he loved Fanny Brawne.

In the first two lines, the poet tells the Bright star that he would like to be steadfast like the star. The word 'steadfast' suggests North Star or Polaris that remains steadfast in the north sky. The poet says that he would like to be steadfast but not alone like it. He realizes that steadfastness cannot be achieved by human beings as they are constantly in flux. He does not want to live the life of a lonely hermit.

Lines 3 and 4 describes the loneliness and motionlessness of the North Star whose eye lids are open all the time. It keeps watching like sleepless religious hermit. Further the poet says that the star observes the moving water of the earth. The star also keeps gazing on snow-clad mountains and empty barren land.

In lines 9–10, the poet says that he would like to be unchangeable and steadfast like the star but not in high heavens. He would like to rest his head on his beloved's "ripening breast". The word ripening suggests blossoming youth of his beloved. In line 11–12, the poet expresses his desire to feel his beloved's breathing eternally. The word 'soft' and 'pillowed' expresses

sensuousness. The speaker wants to rest his head on soft breast of his beloved which is like soft pillow. He wants to keep awake forever in 'sweet unrest'. 'Sweet unrest' is atypical Keatsian Paradox. Finally the poet says that if he cannot hear tender breathing of his beloved, he would welcome death with no regrets. He would like to swoon to death without the presence of his beloved.

The sonnet is written in iambic pentameter with rhyme scheme—ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG. There are several figures of speech in the poem like alliteration, personification, etc. 'The mountain and moors', 'still steadfast, still unchangeable, 'tender taken breath' are alliterations used by the poet. 'The star watching and gazing' is an example of personification. 'Bright star' symbolizes eternity, 'Eremitic' 'isolation' 'ripening' breast' blossoming youth. The poem is full of beautiful, concrete and sensuous imagery.

The poem contains theme of love, death, time, loneliness, steadfastness and change, man and natural world, love and sensual pleasures.

2.5.2 Appreciation of Fiction (Novel and Short Story) :

The following points should be kept in mind while appreciating works of fiction.

- We identify the author's thesis and purpose.
- We discuss the structure of the narratives and drama which comprises of exposition, rising action, crisis, climax, denouement and resolutions.
- In literature, character is a verbal representation of a human being. There are round as well as flat characters. Flat characters remain static and unchanged. Characters can be disclosed through their actions, thoughts, speech and statements by other characters. Discuss characters, particularly the protagonist in detail while appreciating the works of fiction.
- Point of view refers to the position and stance of the speaker that the author adopts for his works. There are first person points of view, second person point of view or omniscient point of view. Sometimes there is mingling of different points of view.
- Setting refers to the background or surrounding which may be natural political or cultural. Discuss the setting of the work in brief.
- Idea refers to thought, opinion, concept or principle in the fictional work such as love, justice etc. literature expresses human values through ideas. Identify idea in the work of fiction. Idea represents theme of the literary work.
- In literature, imagery plays an important role. It triggers senses of sight, sound, touch, smell, hearing etc. there is also kinetic energy that relates to motion. Imagery is often dominant in poetry.
- Figurative language refers to rhetorical or literary devices like, metaphor, simile etc. figurative language is also dominant in poetry. However even in fiction, it is often used to enhance the artistic effect.

We discuss imagery and figurative language in critical analysis of the work of fiction.

- Symbolism and allegory are often employed by the fiction writers. There are cultural symbols, myths, parables and fables in works of fiction. We identify them and discuss their meaning and relevance.
- Tone refers to the attitude and feelings of the writer. Major aspect of tone is the communication of humour. Laughter is evoked by incognito and the use of laughable. Objects, irony, describe contradictory statements and situations. There are verbal and situational ironies. Find out irony and identify the tone in the work of fiction.
- Comparative study is an important aspect of critical analysis of a work of art. Similarities and differences can be highlighted by comparison and contrast. Find common grounds of comparison.
- We discuss the style of the writer highlighting its characteristics.
- Here is the sample outline of the critical analysis.

1. Information about the work.

- I. Title of the work
- II. Author
- III. Publication Information
- IV. Thesis statement

2. Summary of the work.

3. Critical Analysis

- I. Plot–structure
- II. Characters
- III. Point of view
- IV. Setting
- V. Idea
- VI. Tone
- VII. Language and style
- VIII. Comparison and contrast (if necessary)
- IX. Conclusion

2.5.3 Critical Approaches for Appreciation of Literary Work :

There are several critical approaches for understanding and interpreting literature. Literature is related to history, psychology, culture, morality, society, political ideology etc. There are also some critical approaches related to style, structure, archetypes etc.

Moral and intellectual approach is concerned with content and values. Literature has been traditional mode of propagating morality, religion or philosophy. Formalism and new criticism deal with study of text form, ideas, ambiguities and soon. Historical approach stresses on the relationship between literature and history. Structuralism deals with narrative structures

and the structure of any type. A structuralist analysis of style stresses the ways in which writers utilize such structures.

Feminist approach holds that literature has always been patriarchal in nature and the role of women has been neglected in society as well as in literature. Karl Marx saw society as an opposition between capitalists and proletariat. Marxist approach focuses on economics as the base of class conflict. As a result, literature is judged from economic point of view.

Psychological approach is based on Freudian and Jungian theory of human psyche. According to these theories, human behavior is the result of unconscious mind. For example, Hamlet suffers from Oedipus complex (the passionate attachment with his mother). The Archetypal approach is derived from Carl Jung's idea of archetypes or first patterns. This approach holds that literature is grounded in archetypal patterns' Northrop Frye discussed fundamental archetypal patterns in literature.

Jacques Derrida proposed theory of deconstruction which stresses ambiguity and contradiction. The theory of Reader Response is rooted in phenomenology which deals with the understanding of how things appear. According to this theory, the reader is a necessary third party in author–text–reader relationship. Exponent of this theory was Stanley Fish. It aims at enhancing the skills and discipline of readers.

2.6 KEY WORDS

Mimesis : Imitation

Dulce : sweet

Utile : Useful

Esemplastic : Imagination

Propaganda : Biased information used to promote political cause.

Humanistic : Relating to principles of humanism.

Empathy : Ability to understand and share feelings to others.

Bibliography : the process of using literature/books to tackle mental disorders

Artistry : skill, craftsmanship

Cultural literacy : ability to understand and participate in a given culture

Suggestiveness : Open to interpretation. Evocativeness

Phonological : Relating to the system of constructive relationship

Stylistics : the study of distinctive style

Monosyllabic : One syllable. Foot

Disyllabic : two syllables foot

Trisyllabic : three syllables foot

Quatrain : four–lined stanza

Couplet : two lined stanza

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of a literary work**

Imagery : Visually descriptive or figurative language in literature.

Irony : the use of words that are opposite of what you mean

Paradox : A statement with opposite ideas put together

Symbol : a thing that represents idea or quality

Archetype : a typical example of certain person or thing. A primitive mental image inherited from the earliest human ancestors.

2.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS :

| |
|--|
| <p>ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN THREE OR FOUR SENTENCES.</p> |
|--|

1. What is mimesis ?
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.....
.....
2. What are the main functions of literature ?
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.....
.....
3. How does reading of literature expand our understanding of life and the world ?
.....
.....
.....
4. What are the qualities of good literature ?
.....
.....
.....
5. What are the three level of textual analysis ?
.....
.....
.....
6. What is iambic pentameter ?
.....
.....
.....
7. Define metaphor and give an example of a metaphor ?
.....
.....
.....

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE OPTIONS FROM THOSE GIVEN BELOW.

1. A novel is a part of _____.
(a) Fiction (b) Poetry (c) Biography (d) Epic
2. The Iliad is _____.
(a) An elegy (b) A sonnet (c) A play (d) An epic
3. Intellectual beauty is a characteristic of _____.
(a) Good literature (b) Good music
(c) Good art (d) Literature in general
4. Style is not the coat of the writer but his _____.
(a) Body (b) Skin (c) Bones (d) Brain
5. Anapest meter has _____ syllable.
(a) Two (b) Three (c) Four (d) Five
6. Pentameter has _____ feet.
(a) Two (b) Three (c) Four (d) Five

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE FOLLOWING POEM

Sonnet 116 : Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds

– *William Shakespeare*

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we learn about functions, objectives and benefits of literature. We also discussed why literature is necessary and how it helps people in living a better, more meaningful life. We also discussed technical aspects of style, dictum and meters and provided useful tips to appreciate poetry and fiction. We also provided samples of critical appreciation and outline of critical analysis of a fictional work. You are advised to practice

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critical analysis of some poems and short stories. You will find lots of poems on 'Poem Hunter.com'. of great English and American poets.

2.9 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Hudson W. H. *An Introduction to the study of Literature*. Harrap, London 1913.

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Praveen K. Thaker. *Appreciation English Poetry*. Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd. Hyderabad, 1999.

Edgar V. Roberts. *Writing About Literature*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, USA. 1995.

David Daiches. *Critical Approaches to Literature*. Orient Longman, Hyderabad 1981.

ANSWERS

- | | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. (a) | 2. (d) | 3. (a) | 4. (b) | 5. (b) |
| 6. (d) | | | | |
