

: STRUCTURE :**13.0 Objectives****13.1 Introduction****13.2 The Concept of Literature****13.3 The Concept of Culture****13.4 Let Us Sum Up****13.5 Key Words****13.6 Points to remember****13.7 Understanding further****13.8 Understanding further****13.9 Understanding further****13.10 Books Suggested****Answers****13.0 OBJECTIVES**

In this Unit we shall;

- discuss the meaning of literature,
- discuss the meaning of culture,
- discuss the connection between literature and culture.

On completing this unit, you should be able to;

- understand the concept and meaning of culture,
- understand the concept and meaning of literature,
- establish the relationship between literature and culture,
- understand the symbiotic relation between literature and culture,
- have a clear perspective of how literature and culture impact each other.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature and culture are two highly complex concepts that pervade every sphere of our life. It is important to have a clarity on not only the the two concepts separately but also their connection with each other.

13.2 THE CONCEPT OF LITERATURE

The word literature derives from the Latin word littera, ‘a letter of the alphabet.’ The Latin word for literature was simply the plural, litterae, and in this basic sense literature embraces everything written.

Another way of defining literature is to limit it to ‘great books’, books which, whatever their subject, are ‘notable for literary form or expression’. Because literature has not been captured in writing only, there has also been a rich oral tradition in all literature. In fact all great literature started in an oral form of storytelling, myths, ritual speeches etc.

In the attempt to define the term ‘literature’, one can distinguish between two general directions : a broad and a narrow definition. Oral or written, what is more important here is that these words are supposed to stimulate the imagination and confront the reader with a unique vision of life. The underlying assumption is that a work of literature must be a creative and universal form of expression which addresses the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual concerns of humanity. However, this idea about literature is no more than the fourteenth century idea that literature is writing (Milner, 1996 : 1). In the eighteenth century literature was viewed as “well-written books of an imaginative or creative kind” (William, 1976 : 152). Good literature is said to demonstrate craft and artistry and has the power to raise questions, provide fresh points of view, and expand the understanding of self and the world.

TIME NOW TO CHECK YOUR COMPREHENSION. CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ? THE FIRST ONE IS DONE FOR YOU :

i. What is literature ?

Literature is a term used to describe written words and some times it extends to spoken words as well. In fact, all literature have had their beginning in oral forms.

ii. How is literature a mirror of society ?

iii. How far is a narrow definition of literature feasible ?

iv. What could be the broad definition of literature ?

13.4 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

The English word ‘Culture’ is derived from the Latin term ‘cult or cultus’ meaning tilling, or cultivating or refining and worship. In sum it means cultivating and refining a thing to such an extent that its end product evokes our admiration and respect. This is practically the same as ‘Sanskriti’ of the Sanskrit language. The term ‘Sanskriti’ has been derived from the root ‘Kri (to do) of Sanskrit language. Three words came from this root ‘Kri; prakriti’ (basic matter or condition), ‘Sanskriti’ (refined matter or condition) and ‘vikriti’ (modified or decayed matter or condition) when ‘prakriti’ or a raw material is refined it becomes ‘Sanskriti’ and when broken or damaged it becomes ‘vikriti’. It is generally accepted that culture embodies the way humans live with and treat others and how they develop or react to changes in their environments. Just like we have the broad and the narrow definitions of literature, we have the ‘little c’ and the ‘big c’ culture. Little c culture is BBV : Belief, behavior and Values; while Big c culture is MLA–Music, literature and art.

Sometimes culture is used as a synonym for civilization. However, it is important to understand that the two are completely different. Culture is intrinsic, civilization is extrinsic. Culture is our inner refinement, while civilization is external development.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : 1

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ? THE FIRST ONE IS DONE FOR YOU :

- iv. What is culture ?
Culture provides us with ideas, ideals and values to lead a decent life. Culture is our world view.
- v. In what ways is culture a way of life ?
- vi. What is the difference between culture and civilization ?
- vii. How would you define 'Little C' and 'Big C' ?

13.5 KEY WORDS

Intrinsic : belonging naturally

Extrinsic : Operating from outside

Symbiotic : a mutually beneficial between different people or groups

Caricature : distorted or exaggerated drawing

Colonization : the action of appropriating a place or domain for one's own use

Documentation : the process of classifying and annotating texts

13.6 LET US SUM UP

Literature reflects the history of civilization. All the written manifestations of culture form literature. Literature teaches us to engage with the past. Shakespeare, Milton, Chinua Achebe, Virginia Woolf all take us to a journey into the society of a past time. What kind of people lived in that society, how they behaved, what were the norms of life they followed; all this is the subject of literature.

Literature emerges out of culture and culture is propagated by literature. It is a mutually beneficial connection that they have. If culture is a way of life, literature drafts it in the most authentic manner. History is only a record of events, literature is the actual record of people.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : 2

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ? THE FIRST ONE IS DONE FOR YOU :

- I. What is the relation between literature and culture ?
Literature and culture have a symbiotic relationship where they support and promote each other. One cannot flourish without the other.
- II. How does culture impact literature ?
- III. How is culture impacted by literature ?

13.7 POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Literature is a socio-cultural response by writers.
2. Literature and culture share a symbiotic relationship.
3. Study of literature is important to get acquainted with a culture.
4. Culture is propagated and popularized by literature.
5. Culture cannot survive without literature.
6. Literature cannot come into existence without culture.
7. Literature is the documentation of culture.
8. Literature can change a culture.
9. Literature changes with the changes in culture.

13.8 UNDERSTANDING FURTHER

To Understand further let us read the poem *The Patriot* by Nissim Ezekiel :

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct,
I should say even 200% correct,
But modern generation is neglecting –
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.
Other day I'm reading newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Threw stone at Indirabehn.
Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying (to myself)
Lend me the ears.
Everything is coming –
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
Be patiently, brothers and sisters.
You want one glass lassi ?
Very good for digestion.
With little salt, lovely drink,
Better than wine;

Not that I am ever tasting the wine.
 I'm the total teetotaller, completely total,
 But I say
 Wine is for the drunkards only.
 What you think of prospects of world peace ?
 Pakistan behaving like this,
 China behaving like that,
 It is making me really sad, I am telling you.
 Really, most harassing me.
 All men are brothers, no ?
 In India also
 Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Hindiwallahs
 All brothers –
 Though some are having funny habits.
 Still, you tolerate me,
 I tolerate you,
 One day Ram Rajya is surely coming.
 You are going ?
 But you will visit again
 Any time, any day,
 I am not believing in ceremony
 Always I am enjoying your company.

<<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-patriot-10/>>

This poem is an interesting caricature of an Indian patriot in the seventies of India. To a reader born much after the seventies (as you all are), this poem may serve as a mirror of Indian culture at the time. Not only does it take you to a journey of India in the seventies, giving you clear insight of what people believed in; what were the major issues before those people; how they welcomed their guests; what according to them was the ideal of patriotism but also the poem tells you the kind of English those people used. Present continuous tense was being amply used, because people thought in Hindi and then translated it in English. It was a time when in order to be respected as a patriot, you were required to believe in the Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence. A clear divide between an older, nationalist generation and a younger modern generation had started to emerge. People welcomed their guests keeping in mind the spirit of 'Atithi Devo Bhav'; however, the younger generation had come under the influence of the West and they attached more value to the western concept of fashion. Lassi—the Indian drink had started to give way to wine.

Emphasis : This piece of literature acquaints you with the culture of the times when it was written. History books present the events that take place in a given time. Literature presents the way people lived, thought and behaved in a given time.

13.9 UNDERSTANDING FURTHER

Let us understand this symbiotic relationship between literature and culture through two recent examples :

Diaspora Literature : The diaspora literature is one of the most popular literary trends of our times. Globalization led to people leaving their homes in search of greener pastures. They began scattering about across nations. Afflicted with a sense of exile which led to quest for identity, writers in the diaspora produced a literature which places a yearning for home at the centre of their literature. Diaspora culture gave birth to diaspora literature and in turn diaspora literature manifests the diaspora culture.

Postcolonial literature : This is a kind of literature, the very basis of which is a cultural change. Imperialism and colonialism led to a different kind of mind set. Exploitation and control became the norm in the aftermath of Western colonization. There emerged a dominant centre that controlled its margins or colonies. On the part of the colonized, this culture is marked by :

- An initial awareness of the social, cultural and psychological inferiority
- A struggle for ethnic, cultural and political autonomy
- A growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity

This post colonial mindset is most authentically reflected in the postcolonial literature.

Having learnt the concepts of literature and culture as also the connection of the both, we must now check our progress.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : 3

EXPLAIN THE FOLLOWING. THE FIRST ONE IS DONE FOR YOU.
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1. Literature is the documentation of culture.
More than history it is literature that can apprise us of a time and people. It's the Therigatha written by the Buddhist bhikkunis that brings to life the whole Buddhist way of life and culture.
2. Literature is history written by not a historian but a writer.
3. Study of literature is important to get acquainted with a culture.
4. Culture is propagated and promoted by literature.
5. Culture cannot survive without literature.
6. Literature can change the culture.
7. Literature changes with the changes in culture.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4

1. Literature is a _____ of culture.
2. Literature and culture have a _____ relationship.
3. Culture is sometimes confused as _____.
4. Literature changes with the change in _____.
5. Literature can _____ a culture.

13.10 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Reflections on Culture and Literature . Hannah Arendt (Meridian : Crossing Aesthetics) Stanford University Press : Stanford.
- How To Interpret Literature : Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies. Robert Dale Parke. OUP.
- The English Studies Book : An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture. Rob Pope. Routledge : London & New York.

Reference :

The Patriot. Nissim Ezekiel. <<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-patriot-10/>> WEB..

<<https://www.lanqua.eu/theme/literature-and-culture/>> WEB.

<<https://www.collinsdictionary.com>> WEB.

A Tale of Two Cities. Charles Dickens. Kindle.

ANSWERS**Check your progress : I**

- ii. The set of values, beliefs, and rituals of a group of people form their culture. Culture is the shape they mould their life into. Their food, dress, music, folklore all define their culture.
- iii. Culture is what we are and civilization is what we make use of or possess.
- iv. Little c is BBV : Belief, behavior and Values; while Big c is MLA– Music, literature and art.

Check your progress : II

- ii. Literature derives its life force from culture. Culture provides the setting for literature. George Orwell presented a simulacrum of the Russian Revolution in Animal Farm.
- iii. Literature not only mirrors culture but also powerful literature can shape culture. Literature presents a way of life, which cultures imbibe. Lord of the Flies brought about a cultural change in the importance that it put on individual. It changed the very way people behaved under the constraints of societal expectations.

Check your progress : III

- II. Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities is based on the French Revolution. The book opens with :

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

No Historian can ever draft a time in such evocative terms. A historian paints the times but a writer brings alive the mental make up of people which shapes the time.

- iii. While history can be informative in terms of the major events that took place, literature informs us about how, and how much those events impacted the people of the time. In a way, Literature is people's story, while history is the story of the elite.
- iv. This may be easily corroborated by the example of British and American Literature. Not many have traveled to England, but most of us know the English ways of life in different ages of history through Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Orwell, Hemingway, Robert Frost etc. The American and English culture has impacted us through their literature.
- v. A civilized world without literature is unimaginable. The history of literature is as old as the history of culture. Some oral tradition of literature had still started to emerge even before literature as a structured, organized form could come to exist.
- vi. In 1972, Mary Wollstonecraft published A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. This book changed the very way people perceived woman. It became the first treatise of Feminism, which led to such major changes as the right of enfranchisement to women. In 1944, when the book was republished, the editor acknowledged in the Preface that since the books first publication, life has changed a lot for women. Needless to say, these changes were all for the better. That is the power of literature.
- vii. A comparison of Ramayan and Mahabharat would amply prove this point. Ramayana was written at a time when people were disciplined and lived a religious life, family values were important, hierarchy was respected. Mahabharat was written in times of social and political turbulence when ethical values were fast disintegrating. One doesn't need to read a political history of the time, as the disintegration is reflected clearly in Mahabharat.

Check your progress : IV

- 1. Mirror
- 2. Symbiotic
- 3. Civilization
- 4. Culture
- 5. create

