

LITERATURE AS A REFLECTION OF THE SOCIETY-ASTUDY

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Literature is a reflection of the society is a fact that has been widely acknowledged. Literature indeed reflects the society, its good values and its ills. In its corrective function, literature mirrors the ills of the society with a view to making the society realize its mistakes and make amends. It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. Literature, as an imitation of human action, often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society. In literature, we find stories designed to portray human life and action through some characters who, by their words, action and reaction, convey certain messages for the purpose of education, information and entertainment. It is impossible to find a work of literature that excludes the attitudes, morale and values of the society, since no writer has been brought up completely unexposed to the world around him. What writers of literature do is to transport the real-life events in their society into fiction and present it to the society as a mirror with which people can look at themselves and make amends where necessary. Thus, literature is not only a reflection of the society but also serves as a corrective mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and find the need for positive change. It is necessary to take a close look at some works of literature, in order to understand how literature actually reflects the society.

Let's begin with **Ola Rotimi's** "Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again", a portrayal of the politics of opportunism prevailing in the Nigerian society. In the play, a former military officer, Major Lejoka-Brown, enters politics for the purpose of personal enrichment and is bent on using military tactics to achieve political success. His egotism, greediness and deceitfulness come to the fore both in his political and marital life. He lies to Liza, his American wife that she is his only wife, whereas he already had two wives. He needs Liza to boost his ego and his material position. His marriage with Sikira, on the other hand, is a ploy to win women's votes through the influence of Sikira's mother who happens to be the head of the National Union of Nigerian Market Women. It means that after achieving his political goal, Sikira could either be deserted or relegated. Most of the politicians in our society breathe out lies like Lejoka-Brown! In order to win the people's votes, a politician can tell a lot of lies and make promises which he does not intend to keep. Once he has been voted into power, the people cease to be relevant; the moment he assumes office, he forgets his campaign promises, becomes despotic, loots the treasure and enriches himself. This is exactly what most politicians in our society do.

In "Death of a Salesman", **Arthur Miller** raises the issue of victimization of workers by the capitalist employers. The play reflects what happens in the American capitalist society. The tragic hero, Willy Loman, serves a company for thirty years; he helps the company to open new grounds in many places but in his old age, they take his salary away. The play exposes the

inhumanity of some employers to their employees whom they use and dump without regard for their wellbeing. It is not only in companies that some employees suffer the fate of Willy Loman but also in the civil service. In Nigeria, for instance, an uncountable number of pensioners have died of hunger, owing to non-payment of their pensions. Some of them, like Willy Loman, have served the big establishment for thirty years or more, only to retire into penury. It should be noted, however, that some workers or employees suffer as victims of their own negative attitude and mediocrity. The pathetic experience of Willy Loman describes the situation of the common man in the society, whose dreams of successful life are shattered and replaced with disillusionment and the agonizing sense of futility.

Chinua Achebe's "No Longer At Ease" depicts the problems and challenges that faced the emergent African administrative class and the factors responsible for the failure of this irresponsible class of leaders represented by the novel's central character, Obi Okonkwo. The novel mirrors the society and shows how the society's misconception about the purpose of education, coupled with government policies, produce intellectually and morally bankrupt leaders. The novel also shows how both societal and family demands and expectations compel the emergent elite to live above their personal incomes and to consequently resort to corrupt means of self-enrichment as exemplified by Obi's corrupt action. In the novel, Achebe paints a society where extravagant spending of public funds by public officers is the norm, and where corruption has been institutionalized. By taking bribe, Obi Okonkwo has merely done what everyone else does; it is his weakness and inability to escape being caught that is actually frowned at by his kinsmen. The novel aptly depicts the situation in our society, where those who loot the public treasuries, without being caught, are held in very high esteem and are honoured with chieftaincy titles.

Another example of literature as a mirror of the society is **Wole Soyinka's** "The Trial of Brother Jero". This play exposes religious charlatanry, a prevailing problem in our society. The main character, Brother Jero, is a typical example of the fake prophets and other religious charlatans operating in various parts of the society. Like Brother Jero, they pretend to be what they are not. They use the name of God and his word as ploy to dupe the unsuspecting seekers of God. They usually pose as miracle workers, lay claim to supernatural powers and promise their victims instant promotion or prosperity, even without having to work for it. Like perfect Jero, many of these charlatans attach high-sounding titles to their names, such as Most Honourable, Reverend X, Most Holy Prophet Y, Living Perfect Master Z, and so forth. Some of them even go to the ridiculous extent of claiming to be God in order to subjugate their gullible followers. Through false prophecies and feigned words, they not only extort money and material things from people but also deceive the ignorant ladies in their congregation and have carnal knowledge of them. In some cases, they even go to the extent of snatching people's wives through false prophecies. One can hardly distinguish the religious charlatans in our society from the characters in the Jero plays. If the works of other playwrights and novelists are studied, the result will be similar: each work reflects the social, political, economic or religious situation of the society in which it is set.

Conclusion

Literature is an imitation of human life and action; it is a reflection of the human society. Literature not only reflects the society but serves as a mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and see the need for positive change.

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