CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1) What is Literature

Literature is composed of those books, and of those books only, which, by reason of their subject-matter and their mode of treating it, are of general human interest; A piece of literature differs from a specialised treatise on astronomy, political economy, philosophy, or even history, in part because it appeals, not to a particular class of readers only, but to men and women as men and women; and in past because, while the object of the treatise is simply to impart knowledge, one ideal end of the piece of literature, whether it also imparts knowledge or not, is to yield aesthetic satisfaction by the manner in which it handles its theme.

A great book grows directly out of life; in reading it, we are brought into large, close, and fresh relations with life; and in that fact lies the final explanation of its power. Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language.
To say that literature grows directly out of life is of course to say that it is in life itself that we have to seek the sources of literature, or, in other words, the impulses which have given birth to the various forms of literary expression.

The great impulses behind literature may be grouped with accuracy enough for practical purposes, - our desire for self-expression; our interest in people and their doings; our interest in the world of reality in which we live, and in the world of imagination which we conjure into existence; our love of form as form. We are strongly impelled to confide to others what we think and feel; hence the literature which directly expresses the thoughts and feelings of the writer. We are intensely interested in men and women, their lives, motives, passions, relationships; hence the literature which deals with the great drama of human life and action. We are fond of telling others about the things we have seen or imagined; hence the literature of description. And, where the aesthetic impulse is present at all, we take a special satisfaction in the mere shaping of expression into forms of beauty; hence the very existence of literature as art.

It is not only the impulses which produce literature, but also the subjects with which it deals. Having regard only to practical purposes - we may perhaps arrange them into five large groups: 1) the personal
experiences of the individual as individual - the things which make up the sum-total of his private life, outer and inner; 2) the experiences of man as man - those great common questions of life and death, sin and destiny, God, man’s relation with God, the hope of the race here and hereafter; 3) the relations of the individual with his fellows, or the entire social world, with all its activities and problems; 4) the external world of nature and our relations with this; and 5) man’s own efforts to create and express under the various forms of literature and art. Looking at literature in the light of this analysis, and considering only the character of its subjects, we may thus distinguish five classes of production: the literature of purely personal experience; of the common life of man as man; of the social world under all its different aspects; the literature which treats of nature; and the literature which treats of literature and art.

After the above analysis, we get a fairly comprehensive scheme of classification; we have, first, the literature of self-expression, which includes the different kinds of lyric poetry, the poetry of meditation and argument, and the elegy; the essay and treatise where these are written from the personal point of view; and the literature of artistic and literary criticism. We have, secondly, the literature in which the writer, instead of going down into himself, goes out of himself into the world of external human life and activity; and this includes history and biography, the ballad
and the epic, the romance in verse and prose, the story in verse and prose, the novel and the drama. And thirdly, we have the literature of description, not in itself a large or important division, since description in literature is ordinarily associated with, and for the most part subordinated to, the interests of self-expression or narrative, but comprising in the book of travel, and the descriptive essay and poem, some fairly distinct minor forms of literature art.

As there is a common racial character in the literary productions of any given people, so therefore there is a common time character in the literary productions of such people at any given period. A nation's life has its moods of exultation and depression; its epochs of strong faith and strenuous idealism, doubt, struggle, and disillusion, unbelief, at any given period of time; and while the manner of expression will vary greatly with the individuality of each writer, whatever that may be, will directly or indirectly reveal itself in his work. As behind every book that is written lies the personality of the man who wrote it, and as behind every national literature lies the character of the race which produced it, so behind the literature of any period lie the combined forces - personal and impersonal - which made the life of that period, as a whole, what it was. Literature is only one of the many channels in which the energy of an age discharge itself; in its political movements, religious thought, philosophical
speculation, art, we have the same energy overflowing into other forms of expression.

2) A Brief Outline of Origin and Development of Soviet - Russian Literature till Stalin’s accession to Power.

Early Russian literature consisted of translations of Greek originals or slavish imitation of Byzantine models. It was predominantly religious in character and consisted of lives of saints, sermons, and polemics against Roman Catholicism. The chronicles were kept in monasteries but, of course, dealt with many non-religious matters.

A notable product of Kievan learning is the collection of legal enactments known as “Russian Truth” (Russkaia Pravda). It was once regarded as a code of laws enacted by Yaroslav of Kiev, but this theory has been put aside, and the prevalent view is that “Russian Truth” was the work of several generations, although there is no agreement among the authorities whether it was an official code or a private collection of no official standing. In spite of the many uncertainties surrounding “Russian Truth”, it is the principal source for the source for the study of early Russian social and economic institutions.

Kiev in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is sometimes represented as an important center of enlightenment. The Grand Duke Yaroslav in the middle of the eleventh and the Grand Duke Valdimir II Monomakh in the
first quarter of the twelfth century are pictured as well-educated men, lovers and collectors of manuscripts.

Mongol domination retarded Russian cultural development. It did not destroy an earlier Russian civilization, but it delayed for at least two centuries any contact between Russia and western Europe, which was at that time the only fountain of progress and enlightenment. The Russian Middle Ages were barren of achievement in any field of creative endeavor, except perhaps that of icon painting, which reached high standards in the fifteenth century.

The Mongol domination had a profound effect upon Russia's conditions in the thirteenth to the sixteenth century and on her subsequent development. With the appearance of schools the importance of the printed word increased. In 1703 the first Russian newspaper was published. The Old-Slavonic alphabet was simplified, and from 1708 on, the modernized version was used in all lay publications, the ancient form being retained in Church books.

Most of the books printed in Russia under Peter were translations. The tsar took keen interest in deciding what should be made available to the reading public, still a tiny and highly selective minority, and the literary output bears the mark of his preferences. The titles published were chiefly dictionaries and textbooks on arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry,
fortification, architecture, geography, engineering, navigation, shipbuilding, and so on, as well as manuals on how to behave in polite society.

The birth of Russian lay literature may be traced to the second quarter of the eighteenth century, when appeared the first Russian fiction writers, playwrights, and poets. The better-known members of this group were Vasili Trediakovsky (1703-1769), Alexander Sumarokov (1718-1777), and Michael Lomonosov (1711-1765). All three had studied in western Europe and were under the influence of the Western classical or pseudo-classical school. Trediakovsky and Sumarokov, admired as they were by their contemporaries, were not distinguished authors, but they contributed to the evolution of the Russian literary language and prosody.

The first Russian literary journals - “Monthly Essays”, issued by the Academy of Science, and “Busy Bee”, edited by Sumarokov and published privately - appeared respectively in 1755 and 1759.

The eighteenth century witnessed a remarkable ascendancy of Russia as a political power. During the reign of Catherine II some 200,000 square miles were added to the national territory, and the population increased from 19 million to 36 million. Russia was firmly established on the shores of the Black Sea and extended here control over the littoral of the Baltic. By the end of the eighteenth century she was a full-fledged and,
at times, the leading member of the quarrelsome community of European states.

Pseudo-classicism and sentimentalism dominated Russian literature at the end of the eighteenth century. The leading representative of the former was Gabriel Derzhavin, who achieved eminence by extolling in his odes the virtues and greatness of Catherine. The founder of Russia’s short-lived sentimentalism was Nicholas Karamzin (1766-1826). The publication of his “Letters of a Russian Traveler” (1791-1792) brought him recognition. Sentimentalism, a reaction against the formalism and artificiality of pseudo-classicism, strove for simplicity in both the subject matter and the form of a literary work.

Karamzin was also a noted historian. In 1803 he was appointed official “historiographer”, and in 1816 the first eight volumes of his massive “History of the Russian State” were published; four more volumes were issued later.

The popularity of poetry continued undiminished and, indeed, with the appearance of Pushkin, reached an all-time high. A number of gifted poets benefited by the simplification of the literary language and the elucidation of the rules of prosody achieved in the eighteenth century and did creditable work, especially in translating ancient and Western classics. The more prominent members of this group were Nicholas Gnedich
1833), Constantine Batiushkov (1787-1855; his literary career was terminated in 1820 by a mental ailment), and especially Vasili Zhukovsky (1783-1852), who produced a Russian version of the “Odyssey”. In the poetry of these authors sentimentalism acquired a sincerity and dignity which were lacking in the work of Karamzin. Zhukovsky became the leading representative of the Russian romantic school.

**Beginnings of Modern Literature:** The fountainhead of modern Russian literature may be traced to several authors of the early nineteenth century. They differed widely among themselves in their gifts and the nature of their work, but each left a lasting mark on Russian letters. Ivan Krylov (1786-1844), Russia’s only fabulist of note, published in 1809 the first volume of his fables, which revealed his genius for drawing concise word-pictures and his mastery of the popular tongue. Alexander Griboedov (1795-1829), a diplomat and a man of the world, wrote but one major work, “The Misfortune of Being Wise”, a comedy in verse dealing with contemporary Moscow society. Unlike Krylov and Griboedov, Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) excelled in every form of literary endeavor. He came from an aristocratic but impoverished family. He was the author of numerous lyrics, poems, plays, novels, and stories, all of them among the best which Russian literature has to offer. From the large number of his publications, the novel in verse “Eugene Onegin”, the play “Boris
Godunov”, and the prose novel the “Captain’s Daughter” may be mentioned more or less at random. Pushkin felt the influence of pseudo-classicism, sentimentalism, and romanticism, but he emancipated himself from the sway of these movements and became one the founders of Russian realism.

Michael Lermontov (1814-1841), like Pushkin was a master of both poetry and prose writing. His works include the novel “The Hero of Our Time” as well as numerous lyrics reflecting the feelings of the ordinary man which are models of simplicity and restraint. Another notable author was Alexis Koltsov.

The authors of the earlier nineteenth century, especially Pushkin, Griboedov, and Lermontov, paved the way for the advent of realism and great novels of Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. Nicholas Gogol (1809-1852) was born in the Ukraine into a family of the lesser nobility. In 1836 came his celebrated comedy “The Inspector General”, and in 1842 the novel “Daed Souls”, the most thoroughly national masterpiece of Russian literature.

Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) was born into a family of landed nobility. His best known works include “The Nest of Gentlefolk” (1858), and “Father and Sons” (1861). His last novel, “Virgin Soil” was Published in 1876.
Fedor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) is probably the most influential Russian novelist. Dostoevsky’s first novel, “Poor People” (1846), brought him immediate recognition. His famous novels are: “Crime and Punishment” (1866); “The Idiot” (1868); “The Possessed” (1871); and “The Brothers Karamazov.”

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a novelist and a playwright as well as a philosopher and a religious thinker. Tolstoy is a towering figure in world literature. His greatest novels are “War and Peace” (1869) and “Anna Karenina” (1877).

While poetry in the middle of the nineteenth century lost some of its former popularity, several poets of talent and skill carried on the tradition of Pushkin and Lermontov. The more notable among them were Fedor Tiutchev (1803-1873), Athanaius Fet (1820-1892), Jacob Polonsky (1819-1898), Alexis Pleshchev (1825-1893), Count Alexis Tolstoy (1817-1875), and Nicholas Nekrasov (1821-1877).

The nineteenth-century tradition of realism was maintained in the closing decades of the empire; simultaneously vanguard literary movements - symbolism and futurism - made their appearance. The principal authors of the realistic school, in addition to Leo Tolstoy, were Chekhov, Gorky, and Bunin.
Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), son of a serf who became a merchant, graduated from the medical school of the University of Moscow but did not practice medicine and turned instead to literature. His literary artistry of a highly personal nature of his stories and plays. At least two of his plays - "The Cherry Orchard" and "The Three Sisters" - rate among the masterpieces of the stage.

Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), short-story writer, novelist, and playwright, was a self-made man. His first story, "Makar Chudra", appeared in 1892. Gorky’s earlier writings showed the influence of romanticism, but in the late 1890’s he espoused realism. His principal novels of the pre-revolutionary era are: "Foma Gordeev", (1899); "The Mother" (1907); "Okurov City" (1910); and "Matvey Kozhenmiakin" (1911).

Ivan Bunin (1870-1953), poet, novelist, short-story writer, and translator, came from a family of the landed nobility. His works include "The village" (1910); "The Dry Valley" (1912); "The Gentleman from San Francisco (1916). In 1933 he became the first Russian author to receive Nobel Prize for literature.

Among the other writer of the realistic school were V. G. Korolenko (1853-1921), A.I. Kuprin (1870-1938), M.P. Artsybashev (1878-1927),
and Leonid Andreev (1871-1919), whose later stories, novels, and plays, however, belonged to the symbolist school.

The ascendancy of symbolism was fostered by the publication in 1893 of a pamphlet “On the Causes of the Decline of Contemporary Russian Literature” by the poet and novelist D.S. Merezhkovsky (1865-1941). Symbolism was a protest against the positivism and materialism prevalent in Russian literature. The essence of symbolism was the rejection of realism, extreme individualism, “art for art’s sake”, and, later, emphasis on Russia’s part and on religion. The movement centered on a group of writers and artists known as “Mir Iskusstva” (The Art World). The principal authors of the symbolist school were Merezhkovsky, his wife the poetess Zinaida Hippius (1867-1945), Valery Briusov (1873-1924), Constantine Balmont (1867-1943), Fedor Sologub (F. K. Teternikov, 1863-1927), Andrew Bely (B.N. Gugaev, 1880-1934), and Alexander Blok (1880-1921), this latter probably the most talented of them all.

Futurism, another vanguard movement, was related to symbolism. It appeared in Russia about 1910 and, full of exuberance and youthful daring, aimed at nothing less than the creation of the “dynamic art of the future.” The founder of the movement was Victor Khlebnikov (1885-1922) and its outstanding representative the poet Vladimir Mayakovskiy (1894-
1930). The first volume of his verse appeared in 1912. After the advent of the Soviets, Mayakovsky became the leading revolutionary poet.

The above outline suggests that while literary levels of the closing years of the empire (especially since the death of Chekhov) were lower than during the great periods of the nineteenth century, literature nevertheless showed robust vitality and produced many works of lasting value.

World War I, with its disorganization and shortages and the drafting into the armed forces of many artists and writers, drastically curtailed cultural activities. Hardships of every nature increased greatly with the outbreak of the revolution and civil war: the struggle for survival rather than for self-expression was what artists and writers had to contend with during these bleak years. Moreover, many of the leading personalities in literature and the arts were non-Bolsheviks and found it impossible to continue to work under the new conditions. Some perished in the civil war, died from hunger and privations, or were exterminated by the security police. Others emigrated abroad. This was a grievous blow, because Russia’s cultural elite was small, and it took years before the loss was made good. Some of it proved irreparable.

The destruction or attrition of cultural forces, however, was gradual. It will be remembered that on the eve of World War I “art for art’s sake,”
symbolism, futurism, cubism, impressionism, post-impressionism, and various brands of abstract painting were favoured in Russian vanguard literary and art circles.

During the opening years of the Bolshevik regime the vanguard movements were active. An important center was "Proletkult" - a federation of militant "proletarian" associations concerned with the advancement of science, art, and especially literature. "Prolerkult" was formed in September 1917, shortly before the advent of the Bolsheviks, and for a time enjoyed considerable popularity: in 1919 it had about 100 divisions in the provinces. The program of "Prolerkult" called for independence from the authorities, especially for the people's commissariat of education, which was in charge of cultural affairs; held that industrial workers alone to the exclusion of peasants and intellectuals were capable of creating a truly proletarian culture; and rejected Russia's cultural heritage. These contentions led to a conflict with the government, which was sponsoring collaboration (smychka) between workers and peasants. Moreover, far from rejecting the heritage of the past, Lenin held (1919) that "one must take all the culture which capitalism has left behind and use it to build up socialism." In spite of these basic disagreements "Proletkult" was tolerated, although its path was beset with mounting difficulties. Throughout the 1920's there was still a great diversity of
cultural movements in every field literature, painting, music, architecture, the theater, cinematography--which may be partly explained by the proclivities of Lunacharsky, who remained people's commissar for education until 1929.