

## **INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION

Sociology is the science of society which attempts at scientific study of net work of human relationships and human groups, and the objective study of social institutions and social processes as well. Thus, it seeks to answer the question of how society is possible, how it works and why it persists.

Sociology quite often enters the realm of other social sciences also, being the study of the complex social life as a whole. Consequently different branches have evolved like, (1) Sociology of Economic Life, (2) Sociology of Politics, (3) Sociology of Education, (4) Sociology of Law, (5) Sociology of Religion, and (6) Sociology of Literature.

We now discuss some aspects of sociology of literature which is concerned with the subject of our study : "Literature is the art of composition in prose and verse".<sup>1</sup> "As with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it"<sup>2</sup>. It means that literature reflects the various facts of the social structure concerned.

Of all the forms of literature, the novel to-day is the most powerful mirror of the age. It generally attempts to express the contemporary beliefs and customs, the family life, the economic and

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1. Webster **New International Dictionary** :
  2. Diana Laurenson & Alan Swingewood. **The Sociology of Literature**. Mac Gibbon & Kee, London, p/12.

political life through different situations and characters, drawn from the existing social web. This shows that literature and sociology are interdependent and inter-related and both these disciplines restructure and refine our understanding of society.

Early sociologists like Comte and Spencer made brief references to imaginative literature as one of the subordinate tools of knowledge in regard to the study of social structure. <sup>1</sup>

Man, as understood in the social sense, is an individual created by the entire social and spiritual life, who in turn, shapes in equal measure both form and content of literature. Human joys and sorrows, passions and obsessions, aspirations and ideals, love and hatred, human weaknesses and strength are the stuff of which it is made. That is why literature today has become an important subject for sociological analysis. W.T. Hudson says that "Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in the life, what they have 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". <sup>2</sup>

In fact, scholars of various types, literary critics, philosophers, linguists, anthropologists and social scientists have been keenly aware of the relationship between literature and sociology. In the first phase of

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1. **Ibid, p.13**

2. W.T. Hudson, **An Introduction to the study of literature**. George G. Harper & Company, London, 1958. p.10

civilized history Plato's theory of memesis established the correlation between art and society. Since then this correlation has been interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of literary developments. In the 17th century, James Wright, Vico Hender and Madame de Stael contributed in different ways to enrich theoretically and empirically sociology of literature.<sup>1</sup> During the later part of the 18th century and beginning of 19th century, value oriented studies of literature made by positivists broke new grounds. They discovered materials from literary works which showed casual connection between facts such as climate, geography and race, and literature in general, which besides imaginative and creative literature included philosophy and politics. Opposed to this, were the scholars who brought values to the centre of their research as they agreed that literature was much more than a simple or indeed a complex reflection of society as a whole. It was, rather, the embodiment of man's essential strivings for a sense of community and authenticity, an attempt to grasp the meaning of a world which was being emptied of genuine values due to the introduction of division of labour. As a result, values became the all important aspect of the study of literature. Thus sociology of literature now becomes primarily the study of those values by which the individual and his society should live. On the basis of this, it can be said that literature discerns the social dynamism in which the dialectic of history is materialised.

It was with Hippolyte Taine that positivism established itself as the methodology of exploring literature as "the collective expression of society, with great literatures embodying the spirit of age in manner".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Diana Laurenson & Alan Swingewood, **Opcit** p. 25-26
  2. Hippolyte Taine, **History of English Literature**, Henry Holt, New York, Vol. I, 1986, p. 33

But he had also a strong Hegelian element which, in paradoxical ways, links him with Goldmann and the Marxist tradition; like Madam de Stael and Herder he also traced literature to the material base of society.

The growth of the Sociology of literature owes a lot to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The problem of relationship of art and reality was solved on the basis of material philosophy, as, for them art "is one of the forms of social consciousness and it therefore follows that the reasons for its changes lies in the social existence of men".<sup>1</sup> According to them, literature was not a passive product of the economic system; they emphasized that various forms of social consciousness including artistic and literary creation actively influenced social reality. Therefore, they criticised the theory of art for art's sake. In his letter of November 26, 1885 to Minna Kautsky, Engels wrote,

I think, however, that the purpose must become manifest from the situation and the action themselves, without being expressly pointed out and that the author does not have to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolutions of the social conflicts when he describes.<sup>2</sup>

To conclude, we can say that sociology of literature has found its basic origin in the growing concern of sociologists to combine various disciplines in studying a literary creation.

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1. B. Krylov in Preface to K. Marx and F. Engels, **On Literature and Art**. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 17
  2. Ibid p. 88

In India, some scholars like S.C. Dube have talked about interdisciplinary approach in the Indian context. Earlier, in America and Britain emphasis was laid on the study of the social complex through the contents of its contemporary literature. The assumption has been that the literature of a society shows not only an impact of the ages but that it also gives expression to most of sublime thoughts and themes in contemporary society, and can be relevant to evolving important sociological conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

"In India the trends of change in family, caste, as well as themes underlying social change can be studied conveniently through the contemporary novels and short stories in Hindi literatures. What is important here is a selection of a proper representative period and authentic set up of creative literature".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Rahuvir Sinha, **Social Change in Contemporary Literature**, First Edition, 1971, Munshiram Manoharlal Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi P. 2.
  2. Ibid : See blurb