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**Is it fair to say that literature is another name for language which has no practical use?**

It is absolutely unfair to say that literature has no practical use. For me personally, literature of all sorts from different countries and cultures has been a great source of learning and has made my mind more open to ideas.

As Marcel Proust said, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having newer eyes” (Proust, 1923). I can think of nothing that makes me see the world with a new and different perspective than literature. Through this medium one can immerse oneself in the different centuries and different cultures, gaining a deep understanding of human nature and history and more importantly ignite one’s imagination.

The question of what constitutes “Literature” has remained an active site of contestation across history. Literature may be technical or scientific works (Ahmed, 2017). But usually works of imagination, essays, travelogues, fiction, and non-fiction are most commonly referred to as literature. The wisdom of centuries – the imagination and creativity of centuries of toil are inscribed in literary works across nooks and corners of the world. In fact, it won’t be hyperbolic to label literature as one of the most important keepers of our collective consciousness and morals over thousands of years.

When we read literature, we see the changes and transformations humans underwent over the course of history. From the forces of colonialism and the brutalities of slavery to the many wars that humans have always fought and the political movements including the feminist movement, all events that have shaped the present world are all encoded in literary works of different forms and textures. By reading stories on such diverse subjects and movements, one’s mind is shaped to acknowledge the dynamism of the human race and literature can also be a testament to accept that some things never change about human nature, like the lust for power.

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Literature gives us an understanding of human nature and the evolving world and social orders around us (Ramanathan, 2018). I can think of no author better than William Somerset Maugham to understand the contradictions of human nature (Sunstrom, 2013). No author captures the life of colonials in far east Asia during the colonial rule better than him. Reading him has opened a journey of insightful exploration into the idiosyncrasies of humans, and through his compelling narratives, I have such a vivid picture of life in the Far East in the early twentieth century – its cultures, myths, and religion.

Like Maugham, there have been hundreds of authors of the present and past who have shaped the way I think and have constantly provided me with a novel vision to perceive and decipher the spaces I inhabit. Through my exploration of literary texts spread across contexts, I have understood the potential of Literature to promote curiosity and increase our levels of tolerance and empathy for different cultures.

Though the binaries between science and creative arts continue to remain rigid, it is imperative to foreground that science fiction is literature too. In his biography, Elon Musk mentions how science fiction, including *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, has been a huge influence on the way he thinks (Sharma, 2023). Science fiction, often an invigorating exploration of the future, fires our imagination and makes us think beyond the earthly realms. Visionaries and pioneers throughout history have been influenced by fictional works that have fuelled their imagination to investigate and explore unfamiliar terrains in greater detail.

For me personally, *The Foundation Series* by Isaac Asimov was intellectually enriching and mind-bending. Its concept of 'Gaia,' that everything in the Universe is interconnected, whether living or non-living, has changed my way of looking at the world and understanding its inner workings and governing principles (Munteanu, 2007).

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The foundation of most, if not all, religions is based on literature – based on a text that worked its way to acquire canonical legitimacy to represent the ethos that the respective religion stood for (Rani, 2021). For Christians, it's *The Holy Bible*, the *Quran* for Muslims, the *Gita* for Hindus, the *Torah* for Jews, and so on. Billions of people are leading their lives based on the tenets of their faith which in turn are entirely based on what is written in their religious literature.

Along with holding sociocultural and religious ideals in place by textually cementing and solidifying belief systems across generations, Literature has also been an incredibly resourceful subversive medium that has helped articulate dissent and critique social hierarchies and fault lines. Literature has, in fact, started and catalyzed revolutions and movements. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe shook the collective consciousness of the United States of America and was a catalyst for the anti-slavery movement (Gordon-Reed, 2011). The evocative potential of this narrative, deeply rooted in America's complex history of racial violence, still makes one cry with its exposition of the sheer cruelty that was an everyday reality in the country. Such is the power of literature – a fictional work of literature had the potential to give impetus to the anti-slavery movement. Apparently, when President Abraham Lincoln met Ms Stowe he said, "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." This is, after all, an illustration of the practical possibilities of literature, and its power to be an agent of change. Similarly, *The Communist Manifesto* By Karl Marx was a huge influence on would-be communists. Movements in countries like Cuba were started because their leaders were influenced by the philosophy Marx inscribed in his works.

Till the 1950s there was no concept of the environment becoming polluted by industries and chemicals. Then came along the seminal work called *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson. This single work of literature swayed public opinion toward the adverse effects of chemicals and

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was met with fierce opposition from chemical companies (Griswold, 2012). This book was the sole reason why a nationwide ban was enacted on DDT for agricultural uses, thereby saving our soil for future generations. It was responsible for the start of the environmental movement and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) without which our environment would have been far, far worse than what it is today (Griswold, 2012). That is another testament illustrating the very practical use of literature.

Literature has a close and intimate relationship to human existence and its inner mysteries. It is an imprecise notion that literature is wholly detached from reality and possesses an abstract relevance. The idea that literature inhabits the realm of fantasy and imagination is likewise somewhat nebulous. There is more to it than this. In actuality, life and literature are two distinct entities. Real-world events and circumstances give rise to creative literature, and life has no intrinsic value in the absence of constructive and creative literature. One of the paths that humans have blazed on their own is literature. Once the necessities of daily existence are met, man pursues his curiosity and investigates the mysteries.

The varied experiences, thoughts, and passions that individuals face in their daily lives are reflected in literature in a variety of forms and styles. Since literature is directly derived from human experience, it can broaden our understanding of human issues, such as morality, values, cultures, and interests. A literary work may leave the reader with a particular sense of what they have read. Literature, being an artifact of human civilization, serves distinct purposes. In one approach to examining these purposes, drawing from Thomas De Quincey, there are two that come to my mind, the first being Power literature. "Literature of power" refers to the ability of literature to influence readers' emotions and thoughts. Knowledge-based literature is the second category, and at the heart of it, this kind of literature serves as a teaching tool.

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In language teaching, many literary texts such as poems, song lyrics, and short stories are used. There are several reasons to use literature in language teaching for linguistic, cultural, and personal development. From a linguistic point of view, literary texts provide a wide variety of authentic texts in a wide range of registers, styles, and text types, at many levels of difficulty. Literary texts are, in fact, a resourceful vehicle for disseminating the intricacies of cultures. Literature can be thought of in symbolic or meaningful terms, such as consistency, harmony, cohesion, structural identity, and stylistic analogy. We can also think of literature as a vehicle for the integration of cultures and the interrelationship between the various activities of humans. After a thorough analysis of the many options, Sorokin concluded that each community has a different level of integration. Studying the audience a writer targets and is financially dependent upon is intrinsically linked to studying the economic foundations of literature and the writer's social standing. Even the aristocratic patron must adhere to class norms in addition to receiving personal admiration since he has an audience, and sometimes an exciting one. To be specific, the author is much more reliant on the reader in older societies when folk poetry is popular; his work won't be shared unless it instantly appeals to the reader.

Thus, reducing literature to being a mere tool of language without any practical entails an ignorance of the long legacy of literary works produced across space and time. Literature, in all its glory and endless diversity, renders it difficult to devise a monolithic definition of what Literature is, and its uses range from helping us understand humankind better to questioning age-old social hierarchies. Perhaps, no one encapsulates the brilliance of the medium of literature as poignantly as William Shakespeare did with his statement, "Literature is a comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation."

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