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**FORMS OF LITERATURE**

Jack Richardson (2006) defines ‘literary form’ as“…the pattern or construction of a work, which identifies its genre and distinguishes it from other genres. Examples of forms include the different genres, such as the lyric form or the short story form and various patterns for poetry, such as the verse form or the stanza form”.

Through form, it orders the action, shapes the thought, and channels the feeling. Through the word, it creates effects of beauty and ugliness; it stimulates the imagination; it moves the audience to respond. Through thought, it mirrors experience, embodies wisdom, anatomizes the world, raises issues and searches for solution. Through style, it embodies the uniqueness of one writer’s way of looking at things and provides us the pleasure of reading them.

Forms are taken to mean the mode in which literature is expressed. Usually, it is in either the spoken or written form. The spoken form predated the written one. The spoken form is common to many in the Third World or developing countries that are not literate. This is the form of literature that is called ‘orature’. It is orally rendered and transmitted from generation to generation. Examples are the oral literature from your locality. The written form of literature is that which has been reduced to writing. It is common among literate cultures. It is no wonder therefore that when the British Colonialists came to Indian peninsula, African countries and other oriental countries, they did not recognize oral form of literature.

Language is an important tool in literature. It is in literature that words are used in a special sense for the writer to bring out intentions. That is, words are manipulated in literature to suite the writer's intention. Let us consider the following texts:

***Poet, lover, Birdwatcher***

To force the pace and never to be still

Is not the way of those who study birds

Or women. The best poets wait for birds.

The hunt is not an exercise of will

But patient love relaxing on a hill

To note the movement of a timid wing;

Until the one who knows that she is loved

No longer waits but risks surrendering-

In this the poet finds his moral proved,

Who never spoke before his spirit moved.

**Nissim Ezekiel**

Poetry is, then, according to this view, a form of erotic, a kind of lovemaking that waits for the muse to make the first move, a medium that is both reticent and suggestive. Perhaps the poem relates to a particularly Indian form of courting inspiration; assuredly it reveals the way Ezekiel’s poetic ‘fire’ is inspired. Now, let us read a poem by Robert Frost.

***Dust of Snow***

The way a crow

Shook down on me

The dust of snow

From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart

A change of mood

And saved some part

Of a day I had rued

**Robert Frost**

Note that, in the above poem, the poet uses ordinary words in a special sense. You need to recognise what is distinctive to use of language in ordinary discourse as opposed to that in literary communication. In this poem identify the juxta positional relationship and the cause-effect relationship signalled in the context of the poem and by conferring values on linguistic items in accordance with the significations of these semantic relationships.

Reading comprehension is a function of cultural background knowledge. If readers possess the schemata assumed by the writer, they easily understand what is said in the text and make the necessary inferences about what is implicit rather than stated. Abstract cognitive structures which incorporate generalized knowledge about objects and events. Schemata concerning a wedding might include knowledge about the roles of bride and groom and other family members, what clothing is traditionally worn, who is invited, where the wedding is held, what rituals form part of the ceremony and so on. Obviously, these schemata will differ cross-culturally.

**Genres**

Simply put, by types of literature we mean are genres of literature. Mainly, there are three broad types of literature, these are drama, poetry, and prose. Under drama we have dance drama, radio and television drama, mime, pantomime, heroic and morality plays. Principally however, they all come under tragedy, comedy, tragic-comedy and melodrama. For now, we should note that drama is primarily written to be performed or acted on stage. Therefore, the playwright usually writes his plays character by character, scene by scene and act by act to forestall any confusion and to ensure correctness during performance.

**Understanding foregrounding in literary texts**

Foregrounding as an attention catchingdevice in a literary passage using repetition, emphasis, unexpected lexical collocations, syntactic inversion, etc. Important stylistic effects are created by unusual collocations, which result in a collocative clash or foregrounding, especially in poetry.

In foregrounding, the reader’s attention is attracted to the formal means of through which the meaning is conveyed.

Foregrounding establishes the hierarchy of meanings and themes in the text, bringing some to the fore and shifting others to the background.

Coupling, convergence, strong (salient position), contrast, irony and intertextual connection are noticed in foregrounded structures.

Foregrounding may justly be called the core of reader centred stylistics because it provides a theory of analysis with the help of which a reader develops the habits necessary for active and independent reading.

A literary text is rich in meaning and has a wide range of linguistic features. Foregrounding and deviation in a literary text play important role in meaning-making process. These in turn add to the beauty and meaning of the literary piece.

Such knowledge helps us to study a work very closely and understand the significance of the use of the patterns of vocabulary and syntax, various metaphorical and symbolic modes used in the organization of the text, and different modes of presentation of thought.

A better and deeper understanding of a literary text can be made through an interactive approach of contemporary ‘stylistic theory’ and ‘criticism’.

The concept of foregrounding and deviation, the significance of imagery, tone, lexis, syntax and the linguistic choices made by the writer are essential for the reader to understand the text. By this the reader can also appreciate the linguistic devices used to bring out the meaning clearly, which adds to the interpretation and pleasure derived by a reader of a literary text.

We need to know how foregrounding, and deviation contribute to the deeper understanding and the meaning of a literary text as well as add to the beauty and aesthetic pleasure. We can also understand how a particular effect can be achieved using certain linguistic choices available, particularly, language, imagery, meter, rhyme, rhythm, and various figures of speech contribute to form patterns in a text. But we must not give too much of emphasis on the literature based on imagination. In this context, Professor of literature at University of Oxford, Dr. Helen Gardner says, “An over emphasis on works of the imagination and neglect of the literature of argument, persuasion, edification and polemic- of works written out of a passionate concern with great human issues will be dangerous”. We need to give an equal importance to Occasional literature also.

**Purpose**

To sum up, we can say that we read literature to gain aesthetic experience, attempt a critical analysis, evaluate a text, develop language / linguistic competence, familiarize with varieties of texts, understand literary contexts, be able to read critically, understand literary, genres, support our ideas, for pleasure, to explore the problem, for enjoyment, to familiarize ourselves with adult language, get philosophical ideas, philosophical ideas, to know different age/ different text, to experience tension, find Peace, understand plot twist, for aesthetic purpose, to do critical analysis, learn critical theories, familiarize with literary language and so on… More than anything to identify human values in the texts!

Now you try the following exercise.

**Look at the following deviant structures and try to find all possible meanings in them.**

\* Ten thousand saw I at a glance

\* Rain’s fingers

\* In a First Death Day

\* Time is out of joint

\* How many issues you have? Three?

\* Dancing pebbles

\* Silent wounds

\* Shy lights

\* The ripest fruit was saddest

\* Every day I ‘m reading Times of India to improve my English Language

A few interpretations are given for your understanding, go through them and attempt your own interpretation of them.

**DANCING PEBBLES**

The phrase has a ‘common adjective+ noun’ structure. But the choice of words suggests a deviation insofar as ‘pebbles’ themselves do not move, whereas light falls on them through the curtain and moves, thereby creating an illusion of the movement of the pebbles.

**THE RIPEST FRUIT WAS SADDEST**

The noun phrase ‘The ripest fruit’ is used with an adjective ‘saddest. It is a restatement of the idea that life, at its fullest, is closest to death”. One who is ready for death and ready for rebirth: the cycle must go on, and that is why the ripest fruit is saddest. Now, you read the following poem and try to do an interpretation of your own first, then, compare your answer with the standard interpretation given.

**READ THE FOLLOWING POEM AND AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT.**

**Red Wheelbarrow**

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.

William Carlos Williams

This poem is centred on a ‘wheelbarrow’ and ‘chickens. We need to recognise what these words signify. Wheelbarrow and chickens share the same linguistic environment by virtue of being placed side by side in the context. The preposition ‘beside’ serves as a linguistic sign to signal this juxtaposition between the two. That wheelbarrow and chickens are juxtaposed signifying that they should be related- either by contrast or by similarity.

What the context demands is that the juxtapositional relationship between the wheelbarrow and chickens should be validated, and this relationship is central to the meaning of the poem. One of these linguistic signs, namely ‘so much depends upon’, demands that the relationship between wheelbarrow and chickens should be significant rather than marginal. The other linguistic sign through a series of paired contrasts such as a/ the, red / white, singular Plural noun, glazed / non-glazed, demands that the relationship should be one of contrasts. In the conventions of normal language use, wheelbarrow and chickens are not habitually represented as related; nor the contrast between them thought of as crucially significant. This makes wheelbarrow and chickens related by contrast and cause the resultant relationship between them to assume significance as the contrast between things that share the same context and exist Side by side. This co-existence of opposites, on a large scale may even suggest the irony in modern man’s existence.

**Read the following poem and its explanation.**

**Dust of Snow**

The way a crow

Shook down on me

The dust of snow

From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart

A change of mood

And saved some part

Of a day I had rued.

Robert Frost

**Approaching the text**

Identify the association between the lexical items crow, dust, snow, and hemlock tree occurring in the first stanza. The first stanza is stylistically more important than the second, and these noun phrases are more relevant to interpretation than the rest. Note how these two stanzas related to each other. These two stanzas related by cause-effect.

It is a crow’s shaking down of ‘dust of snow’ from a ‘hemlock tree’ that effects a change of mood in the speaker and saves some part of a day he had rued. It is the verb phrase ‘has given’ in the poem that signals this semantic relationship to us. The magnitude of the effect, here, is not proportionate to that of the cause; nor does the effect evolve out of the cause. The convention of normal language use stands broken as it keeps cause and effect separated.