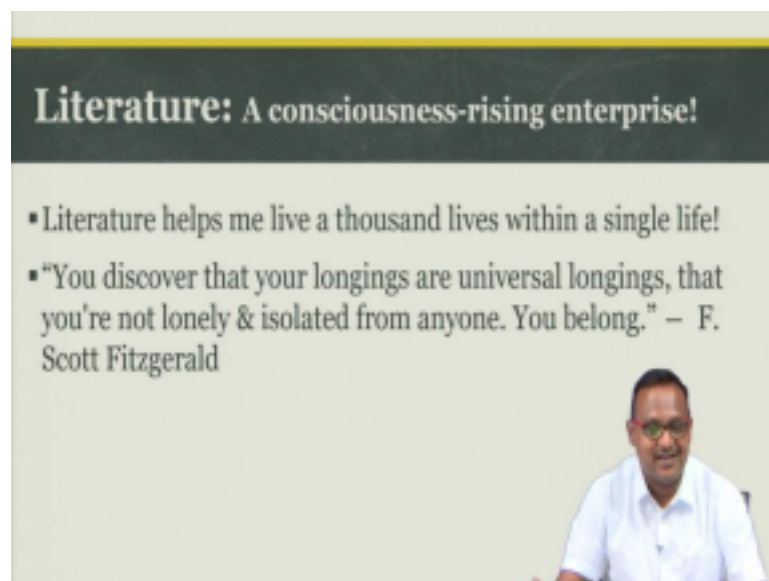


**Elements of Literature and Creative Communication**  
**Prof. H S Komalesha**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur**

**Lecture - 03**  
**A Multidimensional Engagement with Literature**

Hello, welcome again. This is the 3rd lecture. We will be continuing the discussion we had in the previous class.

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If you recall, we left with the statement - 'literature helps me live a thousand lives' - or you can even replace a thousand with a million lives within a single life. And I asked you to engage with the statement and come up with your answers. In the subsequent classes, I will share a dedicated forum wherein you can upload your responses. Until then probably what you can do is you can just jot down some of these points and when the opportunity comes you can share them. Before we discuss this particular concept, let us quickly do a recap of what we did in the previous class. Again, I said that this class will be filled with stories and we began with an interesting story of a group of blind people and an elephant and how each of them touch only a part of the elephant try to define it from their perspective. And how unless we learn to forget our individual differences and unite all these experiences together with how it becomes impossible for us to understand the concept of literature in its holistic way, we also learnt how that story plays a key role in our philosophical traditions.

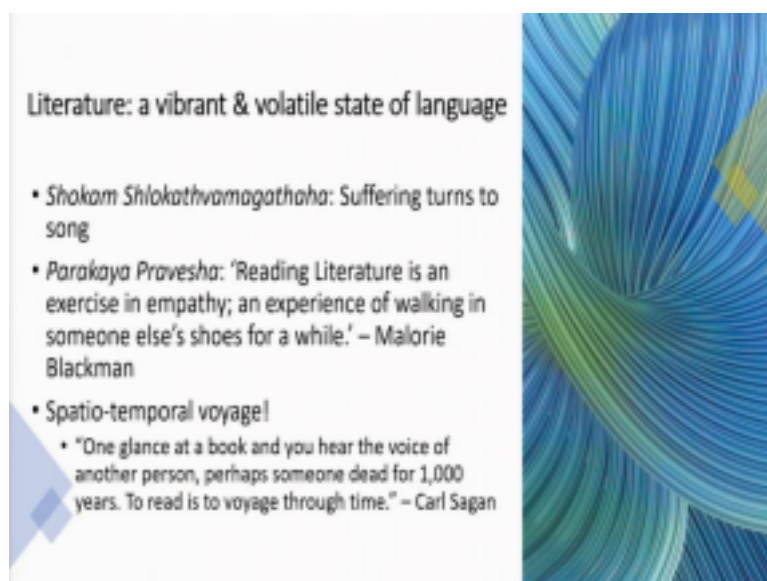
And we also had another interesting story about the Buddha and layers of consciousness and how when we say Buddha and the enlightened ones, it becomes highly reductivistic, and people do not pay much attention because the concept is quite abstract. On the other hand, if you explain the concept by narrating a short story of a person standing on a seven-storied building and how guests such as love, compassion, sympathy are welcome guests who can be let in; while guests like anger and hatred are barred from entering. So, that is the first step towards understanding that state of existence called enlightenment. And once we know it, we have already taken the first step towards becoming the Buddha. We also understood that there are two routes to knowledge production. One is the conceptual route, other is the perceptual route. The perceptual route involves your sensory organs, and literature takes a resort to the perceptual mode and imparts an experience. Because whatever it wants to tell you, it imparts an experience because experiential learning, as all of us know it, is an everlasting one. It lasts long, unlike a learnt one. So, literature resorts to this kind of experiential teaching. As part of that, we discussed a couple of interesting observations by a French writer and others. Let us continue the discussion in this class as well and now, maybe by the time we complete this class, you will realise how engaging with literature is a kind of multidimensional engagement. How does literature help me live a thousand lives within a single life? I was saying we are called mortal beings, right? What does mortality mean, or even can literature make me an immortal one? If you understand the meaning of immortality slightly differently, we would know that it does. Now, let us discuss how it does so. Before that, let us come to terms with what is mortality. Mortality, philosophically speaking, has certain limitations. Human beings are gifted with certain faculties. We are gifted with certain potentials. Let us say, for instance, we have been gifted with eyes. So, with the help of eyes, you can see what is at a certain distance, but there is a limitation. Let us say if your eyes are sharper, you can see an object that is 50 meters ahead, but if you do not have very sharp vision and if you use glasses like me, you may not be able to see that far. But otherwise, even the person with the sharpest vision has a limitation. Similarly, you can hear a sound that comes from a certain distance, but; so, your ears have the capacity to listen to sounds made at a certain distance, but not beyond that. Let us say scientifically speaking between certain frequencies, your ears or our ears can receive sounds made between certain frequencies, something which is beyond or below we will not be able to hear it at all. Similarly, we have arms right. If we stretch it, we can hold something that is at a certain distance, but it has a limitation. So, that is why we are called mortals. Our abilities our faculties have certain limitations. Now, look at this. By being born a male, generally, I am privy to the experiences of a man or a male right. By

being born in a certain, let us say a middle-class background, I am privy to the experiences of a person who can experience middle-class things but not so much of aristocracy or things like that. Whatever the backgrounds you are born in or born with you are privy to those experiences alone. When you read literature or when you and I read literature what happens? Literature has an extraordinary ability to transpose us into a different realm and for time being it can transform us also. Say for instance when you are watching Harry Potter, I am sure all of you or most of you will have watched or read Harry Potter and imagined its universe. You tend to identify with certain characters and at least if you are watching that movie, you are living the life of the character that you have associated yourself with. For time being you have forgotten who you are as an individual. As an individual, you have a certain identity right. You are born and you have a name, you are born in a particular caste, community, and age. You forget all that and become the other person at least as long as you watch the movie or as long as you read a novel, you read a play something like that. So, for time being literature or the artistic field or the artistic elements have transformed you from being who you are to someone you have identified yourself with. So, until the movie ends you are someone else. So, imagine if that is an experience with just watching one movie or reading one book. If you can read a thousand books you become thousand different characters, don't you? When you read Harry Potter, you become Harry Potter. You start flying with him, kick your broom and go up in the air and all that when you read some other character you become that character.

So, literature has that ability to get under our skin and make us the character that we identify ourselves with; that is why I said that we can become immortal. Earlier, I said that we can only see what is at a certain distance. Now, when you read a work of art, even something not there before your eyes, you can see that. Even for something which is not in the hearing range of your ears, you can still listen to that. So, it extends our limited faculties. In that sense, we become immortal. That is why Shakespeare is still relevant despite writing however many hundred years ago. How many hundred years ago did Shakespeare write, still we read him, still we discuss those characters. Greek plays or the Mahabharata or the Ramayana are still relevant to us. So, when we read, we become those characters. That is the reason I say that literature helps me live a thousand lives or even a million lives depending on how voracious a reader you are, you can replace thousand with million and things like that. But it helps us live multiple lives within a single life that is for sure. Listen to what Scott Fitzgerald says. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you are not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong. That is the message literature gives. Because when you are reading if you come

across a character that is suffering you suffer along with the person. And you realize that the suffering that you thought was yours alone is actually the suffering that many people before you have felt and many people after you will also feel. So, you are no longer alone in your moment of suffering. Please remember these moments of suffering, moments of pain, moments of depression are very excruciating. So, in these moments, if we can connect with any literary work, we can at least relate to the people we find in those books. If that connection is made possible, you realize that your suffering is not yours alone. You are part of a community that is suffering together. So, it is a kind of a collective journey and once that your journey is not solitary there are fellow sufferers. Then to a certain extent, your pain is alleviated you feel you belong to a larger community called the entire humanity itself that is what probably Scott Fitzgerald means. Again, you can have a discussion with yourself about what Scott Fitzgerald means and if you come up with some more ideas and some more meanings, you can as well post them.

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Continuing our discussion on literature and what it means. Here is an interesting *shloka* from the Ramayana. In our Indian tradition, we call Ramayana the first epic. These are our greatest epics. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are our greatest epics. And you all know the story of the Ramayana and how it began. Valmiki right after having bathed in a river, was enchanted by a beautiful sight - a male and a female Krauncha bird in engaging in all merrymaking. They were enjoying themselves together - a couple of birds, you can call them. Then suddenly when they were busy playing with themselves and enjoying all the pleasures of life, Valmiki sees an arrow shooting a bird and the other bird is now grief-stricken. It starts crying. The entire scene so moves Valmiki that he curses

the hunter who shot the bird to death and interestingly, he curses in verse; that means he uses his curse in the form of a poem. This is an extraordinary instance of *shoka* becoming *shloka*. And in English, we call it the transformation of suffering into becoming a song. Suffering transforms itself into becoming a song and that is why most of the time our literary works are songs of our suffering. Because when we do not know how else to express, we give voice to that suffering and that voice has the ability to cure the sufferer at least to listen to it to a certain extent. *Sokam Shlokathvamagathaha* -suffering as it ripens it becomes *Shloka*. *Shoka* as it ripens as it matures becomes a *Shloka*, and suffering becomes a song. So, here we get an insight into how literature is formed. the alchemy of transforming the inner experiences of our being into immortal literary pieces. And earlier, I was also discussing the ability of literature to transform us. We have an interesting concept again in our Indian philosophical traditions, especially in Shankaracharya. We say *Parakaya Pravesha*. He had the ability to *Parakaya Pravesha* - simply means the ability or the faculty to enter into the body of the other; *Para* - the other, *kaya* - body, *pravesha* - entry; entering someone else's body. So, literature has that ability; it can put us into any body or anybody that we are reading. Again, one is intended on anybody or anybody. It has the ability to put us into that body, make us experience the joys of that body, the pleasures of that body the suffering of that body all the fleeting moments of life you experience and then you come back right. That is why renowned young adult fiction writer Malorie Blackman says that reading literature is an exercise in empathy. When you are empathetic what do we call? We have an interesting phrase in English right. To put yourself in someone else's shoes, what does it mean? It simply means that to empathize with the person, to understand their point of view from their perspective try to understand things from their perspective something like that.

And one of the great Kannada poet-playwright P.T Narasimhachar, says that literature has the ability to free us from our self-centeredness. He calls it he calls it *swakendramukti*. What does *swakendramukti* mean? Human beings - all of us are at least self-centred. If not selfish at least self-centred. When we are reading literature, literature helps us shift from self-centred to other-centred. Because if we are reading or as long as we are watching if it is a film or a movie, we become the other person. We have already discussed that right. So, it is an extraordinary feat. It is an extraordinary spiritual achievement. If you know what I am talking it is an extraordinary spiritual achievement. So, if literature can help us achieve this *Parakaya pravesha*, what more do we need than that, is not it? It makes us forget who we are, become the other person and after that, we become ourselves again. We become ourselves again.

Literature entails with it a kind of a Spatio-temporal journey. Well, I try to minimize the use of jargon in this course, but occasionally let me use this jargon. Jargon is a specialized word related to a particular field. There is nothing wrong in knowing making ourselves familiar with a couple of jargons at least bear with me, please. Spatio-temporal - space, time, voyage. When you read a work written 300 years ago, you travel back in space. And when you read sci-fi novels set in set 100 years from now, you travel in future. So, you are at this moment you are living in this place. When you are reading a work of an African writer, you transpose yourself from the Indian subcontinent to the African continent or when you are reading a Japanese work, you travel there. When you are reading a Latin American work, you travel there. Look how many journeys it entails, right. In the case of the digital revolution, it is said that the click of a mouse changes geography into history. You know it is a very well-known statement, the digital revolution. In the case of the digital revolution, it says that at the click of a mouse you turn geography into history. What do we mean by that? Again, a remarkably interesting thing. I want you to think about all these things. The concept of geography as this place different from that place becomes a thing of past. It becomes a thing of history because by sitting here in India you can learn what is happening in Africa, what is happening in Europe, and what is happening in the Americas. Similarly, when you read a work of art written in those, I mean written by people belonging to different regions because literature is region specific to a certain extent. It is rooted in the local but appeals to the universal. So, in that sense literature is glocal. It is a portmanteau term. A portmanteau term combines two separate words to become a single word. Hence, Glocal - from global and local. So, literature is glocal. While being rooted in the local in its appeal and spirit it is universal. So, you get to travel places. While sitting in your room in India you get to visit all those different places; that is why it entails a Spatio-temporal voyage.

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Now, why is literature relevant today? Let me borrow from Rabindranath Tagore. He is our first Nobel laureate and he says something very interesting. He says in times of darkness and despair, it is to a song that one must turn for light, is not it? How beautiful. In times of darkness and despair, it is to the song that one must turn for light. Literature has the ability to offer light in times of darkness. It has always been the case in history. If civilization is down, here comes a work that can uplift the entire civilization! That is the capacity to inspire. That is why such works become cult classics, and they sometimes become even epics because they can inspire an entire generation, an entire community even after many generations. If you read the Ramayana, if you read the Mahabharata, if you even read the Bhagavad Gita, though they were written thousands of years ago at least a couple of thousands of years ago, and even to this day when you read, they have the ability to uplift us, they can inspire us. So, always songs have accompanied us and have provided light, they have acted as a beacon of light. This is Tagore for us.

People ask why we should read literature because remember we live in a utilitarian world, where everything must have a purpose, , a practical purpose. So, people keep asking the purpose of literature because behind these questions is a kind of an apparent comparison. A doctor has an obvious purpose. He or she cures people. An engineer if it is a civil engineer, he or she constructs a building. If it is another engineer, they do some particular work. What does a writer do or what does a reader do, what is the purpose at all? So, here is a beautiful quote from a remarkable movie called Dead Poets Society. We do not read and write poetry because it is cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. Remember earlier we said that literature is a significant expression of humanity. We belong to the human race and therefore, we read it to know about fellow beings. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business,

engineering all these are noble pursuits no doubt. They are necessary to sustain our life because they earn our bread. But literature, poetry, music, love, beauty, romance are what we stay alive for. Is not it? Because they add zing to life, they add beauty to the life they add the necessary things to make our life worth living. This is what we stay alive for, what more use do we need than that. Think of these things and then, of course, we forget that literature does not have any purpose because it adds that great ingredient to life. What is that ingredient? It makes our life worth living; what is more important than that!

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How Can Literature Benefit Us?	
Enhances Reading, thinking, discussing and writing skills; fosters analytical and cognitive abilities	Instils – a sense of wonder; a spirit of courage; a glimmer of hope. Aligns us onto a higher dimension of life
Develops finer sensibility for better human relationship. It encourages us to be sensitive to the whole spectrum of human experience	Inspires us to expand our minds; teaches new ways of seeing the world; and, helps <i>live a million lives within a single life!</i>

And if you are still not convinced, let me talk to you about a couple of benefits. These are for somebody who is still not convinced that literature does not really help us in any way when you read the best of fiction, the best of drama, the best of poetry, it enhances our reading, thinking, writing, and discussing abilities. Is not it? Reading also fosters our analytical and cognitive abilities, but it does not announce; literature does not announce - “you read me, I am going to do all these things for you.” It does it very silently. In that sense, it is a silent achiever. When you do it automatically, you see you continuously read for about a year, read randomly, read widely read wildly. Then see after a year, your reasoning capacity is automatically increased your analytical skills are almost doubled. And the way you construct sentences, and the way you think is almost expanded. Literature also instils a sense of awe in us a sense of wonder in us when we look at nature. In fact, you have heard of the song right. What is this life, full of care, there is no time to stand and stare? When you look at nature it instils in us a sense of wonder, literature also does that a sense of wonder. And when you read a work of art, when you are down, when your spirit is down, it uplifts you. It offers you a glimmer of hope, it gives you a spirit of courage, it takes you on to a different dimension of language. It also



develops in us finer sensibilities towards fostering our relationships. After reading a work of art you realize how relationships are important because at the end of the day life is fleeting. In this fleeting moment if there is something that can add worth, something that can act as an anchor then it is relationships. We realize the importance of relationships all the more when we engage ourselves with literature. An extraordinary benefit is not it? And then it also inspires our mind. When you read the beautiful expressions, you are inspired.

There is a lovely poem by Rudyard Kipling called 'If'. You can please search. you can ask your Google. Your Google will get that poem for you. If you read it, you realize at once how inspiring the poem can be or even if you read Maya Angelou's poems or anybody's poems, you realise how it lends support how it acts as an anchor to your life. So, these are some so-called external benefits to us. But the primary benefit of reading is to engage your life in a meaningful way all the while enjoying it. You enjoy it and, in the process, get engaged with it. What better use of literature, what more relevance do you need than that right? Keep thinking about these things. In the next class, let us continue the discussion.

Thank you.