



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 7. Issue.3. 2020 (July-Sept)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ECONOMY

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Article information

Received:18/07/2020

Accepted: 25/08/2020

Published online: 01/09/2020

doi: [10.33329/ijelr.7.3.128](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.7.3.128)

ABSTRACT

In this paper we are discussing the literature and economics as two interdependent aspects of the society and how literature can be an instrument to better understanding of the economy of an area. Since, literature written over eras built its foundation on economic condition and standard of living of the people, thus, it can be said that literature shows the society in its most overt form. This paper also highlights the importance of multidisciplinary studies so as to develop knowledge and critical thinking in the students of various fields.

Keywords- Economics, Literature, Multidisciplinary, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Exploring the intricacies of the minds of complex human beings is being done by the authors through the ages. From Austen to Arundhati Roy, from Shakespeare to Karnad, every writer has one thing in common, a peculiar understanding for the little gestures and state of a person. The literature of a particular age truly and aptly describes the basic human nature and wants of the people of that time. Literature is almost a panacea to know every aspect of a person like his emotions, desires, social relationships, economic condition, living standard etc. Thus, literature touches sociology, economics, philosophy, psychology, etc. all the subjects with a bird's eye view.

DISCUSSION

Imagine how helpful the literature of a particular country will be for economists and policymakers who are facing daily hurdles for the betterment of economy. If someone doesn't just need a cursory understanding to establish something new or to experiment a new business idea in a place it is really very important to know the literature of that area. For example, the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra is solidly based on the economic conditions of Orissa. A person can get the clear picture of the society and living conditions of Orissa by his poems like Deaths in Orissa, Hunger, A Missing Person, Dawn at Puri, Indian Summer etc.

The effect of economy on literature is vice-versa. They both reflect each other and speak for each other. Both can be compared to the two parallel railway tracks, in coordination and succession with each other but are still separate. Authors and economists base many of their experiments and analysis on the common things.

Economists and authors focus very much on the living standards in a society. They are very much aware of the desires of society. They know a lot about the shortcomings and demerits of the masses. Cowen pointed out that,

“both novelists and (economic) model builders have tacit knowledge about how the real world works, and they try to articulate that knowledge in the form of either a story or equations.”

The increase in the Indian migrant workers in foreign countries because of the increasing population and declining economic conditions in India forms the basis of the diasporic novels, related to the themes of migration and dislocation. The novel ‘Family Life’ by Ajay Sharma beautifully follows the pain and joy of an Indian family living in New York. The father in the family was enticed by the living conditions of USA, thus, establishing a contrast between the economic condition of India and the west. Jhuma Lahiri’s ‘Namesake’ is another such example.

Literature can definitely provide a fresh perspective to an economist. In order, to start a new venture one must understand the wants of the people of that area. Novels like *Pride and prejudice* shows the condition of women of that era and how their decisions are totally dependent on the economic conditions. Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins just for the economic stability and good living conditions. The very first line of the novel talks about relationships and money:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

Thus, whoever author we deal with we get an obscure or overt commentary on the social and economic conditions of that age. They immerse themselves deeply while maintaining some ethnographic distance, to study well the basic mindset of people which is a conscious result of their economic condition. The policies, recommendations and planning of economists can be benefitted a lot if they pay close attention to these authors.

Literature is being known to broadcast the economy of a nation since a long time. If we consider the Victorian era, we see that the writers like Dickens and Gaskell focused their works so much on industrialization and labor economics. Novels of Charles Dickens reflect not only author’s personal life but also gives us the details and mannerisms of Victorian society. In his novel ‘*The Tale of Two Cities*’, he says,

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was a winter of despair.”

In another novel, ‘*Great Expectations*’, Dickens says through Pip,

“I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. They have never troubled me before, but they trouble me now, as vulgar and appendages.”

We can see the base of the novel is the plight of economically burdened society which is not coinciding with the sudden development. Victorian England was going through so much change at that time. Dorothy van Ghent says,

“Dickens lived in a time...in which full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on...a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a ‘thing’...capable of being used for profit”.

This idea of materialistic nature of society has a glimpse in almost all of Dickens’ works. Dickens himself worked as a child labor. He describes the working conditions as disgusting and vile. Thus, imprinting his emotions in his novels to make us aware of the economy of that time.

Concrete study of a field and not the multidisciplinary way can make a subject less lucid and tasteless. The study and research of a field should be done while keeping in mind how a field of study can be manipulated and bettered by considering its connection with other fields. McCloskey reviews “Cents and

Sensibility” and criticizes the mainstream approaches for the understanding of economics and application of the same. She asserts that the study of literature can make the economic models in use to be more realistic and fruitful. She snubs the “mathematical theorem methods” and “statistics” by calling them straight away nonsensical.

In another book named “Narrative Economics”, Shiller says:

“The human brain has always been highly turned towards narratives, whether factual or not, to justify ongoing actions, even basic actions such as spending and investing. Stories motivate and connect activities to deeply felt values and needs.”

Booker prize winning novel, ‘The God of Small Things’ also discusses the capitalism and oppression in details. Thus literature again meets economics. The focus of characters is exploitation of the lower class on the basis of caste and economic condition which forms the very base of this riveting novel. Roy has left no stone unturned to describe intricately the society and the influence of money and power on it.

SOLUTIONS

Now that we know how much different disciplines of studies are interconnected we need to focus more on teaching students different subjects at a time and their minute relation with each other. Multidisciplinary studies should be adopted as a new and integral model in higher studies. The goal is to develop skills and better understanding in students. Students of different disciplines should also be encouraged to have open discussions and exchange ideas. Medical science and Technical education have already opted for such kind of model and so should humanities.

Multidisciplinary studies have many benefits. It develops critical thinking in students when they cross barriers and immerse themselves in different disciplines. They compare and contrast and reach a fruitful result which covers many aspects. Also when a student switches between different subjects they acquire the quality of adaptability and management. Multidisciplinary studies also makes the students study various ‘jargons’, so as to improve a better understanding of different fields. Students start learning by combining different perspectives and increase their ability of problem solving.

CONCLUSION

Thus, there is strong argument that literature is largely based on economy. Hence, learning only one will hamper the critical thinking in students. By studying literature we can easily assess and monitor the economy and living conditions. Patterns, response, acceptance and importance of any economic idea can be well examined on the basis of the literature written about that area. The paper reveals the strong amalgamation between the two fields and how they both supplement each other.

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