



## PHILOSOPHY-LITERATURE INTERFACE: A CRITICAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT :

The main objective of this paper is to philosophically evaluate and comparatively analyze the aims or subject-matter of philosophy and literature, and also the differences and similarities between the aims and, methods, of philosophy and literature. Every area of study has its own aims which are different from the aims of other areas of study. From the perspective of common people, the aims of philosophy may seem to be similar to that of literature. But there must be some significant aims which are delved within the scope of philosophy which are dissimilar to other disciplines. From a broader approach, philosophy is quite different from other disciplines, and this research will focus on its differences with literature. This work will discuss on similarities as well as differences between the two forms of study while acknowledging the significance of a rich exchange between philosophy and literature. The study will broadly engage with the literary works of Plato, Rene Descartes, with a prime focus on Jean-Paul Sartre's literary work the novel *Nausea* (1938). Thus, this research will explore the following questions; what are the aims of philosophy and literature? What are the differences and similarities between the aims of philosophy and literature? Why do we need philosophy or literature or both?

**KEYWORDS :** philosophically evaluate and comparatively analyze , philosophy and literature.

### INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre was a French philosopher, literary artist of novels, dramas, play-right, in the nineteenth century who conveys some of his philosophical ideas through literary works particularly in the novel *Nausea* (1938). Although the philosophical concepts are conveyed in the novel, these are not as vivid as could be in a philosophical text. The significance of this work, however, lies not on understanding the philosophical concepts in isolation, but in employing the same in the form of a literary work and certain literary technique which is precise in his book *What is Literature?* (1947).

Sartre's philosophical novel *Nausea* may be seen as a prelude to his philosophical ideas propounded in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Through this novel, he reaches out to a larger section of the society, beyond the circle of philosophers, to be able to make them see the complexity of life. Sartre's philosophy is the by-product of two great world wars, and his philosophical ideas are deeply influenced by the existing socio-political dynamic of Europe of his time. His novels and other writings show possible life situations of the French society, and reflections are made on those. So Sartre in some sense succeeded in philosophically engaging with his general readers.

Sartre is not alone in this exercise. There are several other philosophers and litterateurs like Plato and Rene Descartes who have employed their philosophical ideas in literary works. They have used literature as a tool to convey philosophical ideas through their literary works such as *The Republic*

by Plato and an autobiographical work *Discourse on Method* by Descartes. The philosophical concepts as these are presented through literary narratives highlight a fine blending of philosophy and literature.

### AIMS OF PHILOSOPHY:

Philosophy has its unique set of aims; primarily, it deals with making individuals' sense of themselves about their problems with the surrounding world and in association with other people. So, philosophers basically talk about the problems of their 'understanding of self and the world'. The problems of one's understanding of self and the world is envisaged out of making personal sense in association with others and the world. Through the expression of personal sense of self and the world—philosophy, in the beginning—tries to make sense of every individual with the conglomeration of other people and also the existence of surrounding world which is precise in the philosophy of Plato, Descartes and Sartre.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, while all other social scientists and scientists study, observe, and report the social or natural reality in a proper accurate manner, philosophers do not only study and observe social or natural reality but they analyze the outcomes of the study and evaluate the methods to gain more accurate picture of the world and then they suggest better ways of understanding the reality on one hand<sup>2</sup>; on the other hand, philosophers seek to develop concepts of meaninglessness, anguish, anxiety, consciousness, intentionality, etc. and the principles of equality, value, humanity, etc. and theories of justice, existence, epistemology, metaphysics, etc. in order to make the society a better place for humanly living which can guarantee the individual rights (viz. right to equality, freedom and dignity). In this connection, the underline philosophy is to maintain the interdisciplinary approach, which is an imperative for a proper understanding of the world and social reality.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the aim of philosophy is to explore feasible accounts of reality which writers express through books, novels, plays, essays, dramas, etc. about their analysis and understanding of the world as they perceived and conceived in their lived experiences. Further, they provide justifications for the outcome of their studies that can be acceptable or not into opinions, discussions and arguments.<sup>4</sup> "It is only this way that criticism and refutation can have a place in philosophy."<sup>5</sup> The acceptable or better result arrives out of criticism, logical dialogues and refutation. Thus, for a better result or understanding and also an acceptable position, one requires temperance to listen to others' arguments of analysis.

Philosophers hold that philosophy is a medium of thoughts about the critical enquiries of life from the essence of truth in pursuance of happening in assembling a moral society in order to make a worthy living. We may say that there are questions because people cannot answer. One of the difficulties of living is that inevitably we encounter such people who think that every question has an answer—and they demand answers from philosophers and when we cannot provide a satisfactory answer they will often turn hasty and judgmental. In this regard, philosophers' guidance—for possible answers, or whether we don't need to find answers but just acknowledge them—insulate and sustain us.<sup>6</sup> Philosophy suggests human beings about the criteria of right and wrong because philosophers raise difficult questions on life and death, war and peace, and so on.

On the other hand, philosophy attempts to make sense of every individual in association with worldly objects and other people. But sometimes our senses deceive us, and it also leads an individual to live in a misunderstanding of illusion. But whatever the thing gets saved in our memory for later review is seriously screwed up. To recognize the exact picture of the world or to identify of their own

<sup>1</sup>Here, I expound the aims of philosophy from the literary work of Plato's *The Republic*, an autobiographical work of Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Sartre's novel *Nausea*.

<sup>2</sup>Ole Martin Skilleas, *Philosophy and Literature*, p.7.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Jones, "The Nature and Aims of Philosophy", pp.162-3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur C. Danto, *What Philosophy is?*, p.8.

misunderstanding or misperception of illusion or hallucination, people require to employ their mental reasoning in their daily life.<sup>7</sup> Each and every human being is born with an intellect which they develop to its highest level and that human beings should achieve excellence through engaging in some task with constant thinking through the process of consciousness.<sup>8</sup> The random curiosity of an individual appears out of their spontaneous engagement or the cultivation of mind. In this regard, the ultimate aim of philosophy is to develop human mind to its best and actualize one's potential to the highest level; one which contributes to make humanly living and this world better. Thus, a human being can recognize real world through the constant engagement of mind into evaluation even though our senses deceive us.<sup>9</sup> In this connection, the purpose of philosophy seems to eliminate an individual's misunderstanding of illusion or unreal world through examination, study, argument, opinion, discussion, justification of other people. So the primary aim of philosophy is to find an acceptable answer to life's open questions through evaluation, justification, examination, observation and so on.

### AIMS OF LITERATURE:

The literature is an area or a scope through which authors illustrate their analysis and understanding of human beings and the world. Moreover, literature is a reflection, mirror, and outcome of society or the world because it demonstrates the individuals or societal issues, aspirations and, also covers the society from all sides. Everything in literature is derived from society—the writers observe the situations, events, incidents, political problems, etc. from the society and delve deeply and profoundly upon the nature of human beings, their life style, profession, relationship with others, daily affairs of life, problems of adventures, etc. and then they write what they observe from their experiences of human lives and in society. It is also a reflection of writers' life-histories.<sup>10</sup> There was a time when a certain historical event, for instance a war, could be better expressed in the form of a novel than a textbook, as Sartre argues that "the literature of the period between the wars has a hard time of it these days."<sup>11</sup>

Literature becomes writer's duty to help all those who are downtrodden, oppressed and exploited—individuals or groups—and to advocate their cause. And his judge is society itself—it is before society that he brings his plaint. He knows that the more realistic his story is, the more full of expression and movement his picture, the more intimate his observation of human nature, human psychology, the greater effect he will produce.<sup>12</sup>

To be precise, literary artists basically write novels, plays, essays, biographies with an aim to establish peace in the human world. The main agenda was to develop civilizing effect on people and also to build awareness moves to delight readers.

Literature is all about life, as we can say life is in a written form. It deals with all about life's tragedies, difficulties, happiness, anguishes, emotions, feelings, imaginations, etc. which all the things are related to life. So literary artists write about these experiences to show general readers, as the affected individuals at the time is likely to induce greater compassion in the readers or human beings—whether be it through dramas, novels, poems, stories, etc., we get to learn complex dynamic of human relationships and conflicts in human and it teaches us how to (re)act in different situations. The vital purpose of literary writings seems to sprinkle or spread the spirit of harmony among human beings. It sharpens our sensitivity to help us know about the honor, bravery, honesty and integrity that evokes our empathy. In a way we can become a good human being. Literature seeks to develop maturity in an

<sup>7</sup>Ole Martin Skilleas, *Philosophy and Literature* p.7.

<sup>8</sup>Here, I cite this statement from Garx Cox's work *Great Philosophers: from Socrates to Sartre* but base on the philosophical expressions of Plato, Descartes and Sartre.

<sup>9</sup>In his famous book *Great Philosophers: from Socrates to Sartre*, Gary Cox expresses the aims of philosophy on Plato, Descartes, and Sartre.

<sup>10</sup>Munshi Premchand. "The Nature and Purpose of Literature", p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>J.P.Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup>Munshi Premchand, "The Nature and Purpose of Literature", p. 83.

individual through experiences and knowledge whereby one can justify himself of real world or truth. Literature aims to fill up with humanly sentiment by providing readers with examples of different experiences, values, beliefs, and meanings throughout written history they may not otherwise be able to find.<sup>13</sup>

From one understanding, literature is metaphysical, allowing one to delve into the secrets of the human mind. It opens a vast world of different individuals thinking and feeling, giving light with colour to drab corridors of existence, putting embellishments and transforming ordinary, dreary situations in life, making common thoughts to rise into something sublime, dramatic, sometimes superficially contrived and interesting if not excitingly, tragically sobering. Literature is passion, a perfection of the human mind. It bears no limits as it crosses boundaries unknown yet to the uninitiated. It captivates and in certain moments enslaves the mind as it lets the heart dictate and lead for reasons only the heart can fathom.

Literature is a form of a mirror through which it contemplates diverse experiences, notions, agonies of man in his daily life which is illustrated through multiple approaches. It is precise that literature is directly extracted from the action of human life. It can enrich our understandings and experiences about the complications of principle, worthiness, lifestyle and human curiosity. Subsequently, by enduring a literary work one can achieve conclusive perceptions of what he reads. Literature is the outcome of human culture which has certain justifications. It has two prime purposes—potentiality to drive the emotions and wills of the readers—and to illuminate certain information and themes regarding social and moral values to the readers.

### **The differences between the aims of philosophy and literature:**

From the above discussion, there is a divergence between the aims of philosophy and literature. The difference is precise in one point as philosophy expounds about the problems of understanding of self and the world which are abruptly emanated from personal sense in association with others and surrounding the existence of the world; it analyzes the outcomes of the study and also evaluates the methods for better result and understanding of self and the world in which one can live humanly. On the other hand, philosophy is also more about an argument but literature is a kind of narrative where expresses the problems and events of individual, other people, society, politics, etc.<sup>14</sup>

The aims of philosophy is to clarify the arguments about the understanding of self and the world as perceived and evaluated by authors in their lived experiences. So, Plato holds that “but now that the best means of deciding is through experience, wisdom and argument? It must be the judgment of philosopher, the lover of argument, that’s truest.”<sup>15</sup> The arguments as philosophers construe to show the veracity of one’s claim or understanding about the reality whereas literature reports about events (war, conflict, life-history etc.) incidents into public domain. The aims of literature are to express experiences, imaginations, thoughts, etc. about prediction of society, human being into a particular narrative to public or general readers. In literature, one has to work around the key idea, frame it any kind of story, a kind of sequence so it could be any historical topic that could be coming up. So, let’s say about the dialogues of Socrates by Plato. What Plato had done—to narrate, he has to bring out a short story from the dialogues of Socrates and explain a kind of sequence that goes into why certain culture evolve over a time, what was the key aspect that was there within the local people or local set and then incorporate the future line about what should be predicted from it. So when one is narrating he/she has not only to include present but also to work around a future perspective or predicted. So Sartre says “the striking thing about lives of the past is that they always unfold *on the eve* of the great events which exceed forecasts, disappoint expectations, upset plans, and bring new light to bear on the years that have gone by”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 82-3.

<sup>14</sup>Ole Martin Skilleas. *Philosophy and Literature*, pp.3-4.

<sup>15</sup>Plato. *The Republic*, p.326.

<sup>16</sup>Sartre, J.P. *What is Literature?*, pp.162-3.



Ole Martin Skilleas advocates that philosophy and literature have definite areas of study. There is thin relation between the two to cover the bridge.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, he looks at the difference between conceptual basis or method of concepts and themes of story because there is no relation between the description of philosophical concepts and narrative of a particular story. The analysis of philosophy is based on the method of concepts (consciousness, intentionality, anguish, anxiety, etc.) and define their meanings explicitly into particular theory. For philosophy, method is the way or path of analysis. A study can move forward to achieve a particular goal or end through the engagement of peculiar method, but the expression of literature is focused on theme/plot of the story. Literature has a great significance in flourishing human emotions, understandings and curiosity. The ultimate purpose of literature is to diminish the pressure of emotions from human beings.

Philosophy explains the full of life experiences with help of essential question, relate explicit like, what is life, where must we go ahead, through the concepts of particular theory whereas literature explains all about the life experiences directly without becoming systematic linguistics terms. In this regard, the dissimilarity principle between philosophy and literature is delved into in language. As both philosophy and literature flow to explain about life's situations, events, etc. both use statement speech. Here the characteristics of philosophy in language are scientific, systematic, rational, because there are references where we cannot use every synonym and other words. On the other hand, the characteristics of literature in language are telling, narrating and explaining in word without restriction of using diverse words. The methodology of philosophy is different from the methodology of literature. The aim of philosophy comes to be in form of reflection of the experiencing life but literature is a historical life in reality.

#### **Relation between the aims of philosophy and literature:**

As we saw above the difference between the aims of philosophy and literature but there are also similarity in aims entranced into between the philosophy and literature. Philosophers explicitly describe making senses of their understanding of self and the world through the literature which is precise in Sartre's philosophy. Here, the purpose of study is to discover what Sartre, through Roquentin in novel *Nausea*, said about the relationship between philosophy and literature. He says that "the two phenomena of philosophy and literature are entwined, and that the conjunction of the two constitutes a field of study."<sup>18</sup> Philosophers mainly seem to define on the expression of concepts within a particular theory. To explicitly impart their philosophical concepts, philosophers have to involve with a narrative even though not writing literary books.

Perhaps, philosophers thought that it may be better to express philosophical ideas through literary works which is precise because of their engagement with literary works as we can see in Sartre's literary works. Possibly, Sartre was not pleasant in conveying philosophical ideas in his first philosophical text *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936). Therefore, his second book was a novel *Nausea* (1938) wherein he employs literary genre to implicitly discuss some philosophical issues. So his interpretation of philosophical concepts into literary works did not seem to be border line between philosophy and literature.<sup>19</sup>

To be precise, philosophers and litterateurs have been engaging with literary works to convey philosophical ideas in explicit manner. It is clear that both the aims of philosophy and that of literature are same in experience to the full of life but they have difference in nuance as they are the reflective interpretation of human experience and can also best be defined as a criticism of life.<sup>20</sup> It is explicit, the aims of both areas of the study, authors seem to make sense and own up of every individuals'

<sup>17</sup>Ole Martin Skilleas. *Philosophy and Literature*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup>Ole Martin Skilleas, *Philosophy and Literature*, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p. 688.

<sup>20</sup>Henry Jones' research paper "The Nature and Aims of philosophy", pp.162-3 and Munshi Premchand's article "The Nature and Purpose of Literature", p.162, hold that philosophy and literature are the reflective interpretation of human experiences as they define a criticism of life.

misunderstanding of illusion with surrounding existence of the world. In this connection, through philosophy and literature, writers express their understandings of lived experiences and the worldview as what they perceived and evaluated for better prediction of humanly living.

... literature properly so-called is not only realistic, true to life, but is also an expression of our experiences and of the our experiences and of the life that surround us. It employs easy and refined language which alike affects our intellect and our sentiments. Literature assumes these qualities only when it deals with the realities and experiences of life.”<sup>21</sup>

So, personal experiences of world and society are the starting point of philosophy and literature. Oladipo postulates the philosophy and literature in two forms: “social consciousness” and the construction of language.<sup>22</sup> The first correlation between the two is social phenomena. For him, they are social not just in the general sense of being produced by people who make up the society, rather they are social substantially in two ways—both philosophy and literature are born out of experiences of an individual or groups—and they often treat very abstract matters that arise from a reflective pondering on the phenomena of life.

It is explicit that both disciplines focus on the same object which can be interpreted upon human beings in various aspects of their lived experiences. They both reflect the search for the better result or understanding and dealing with the problems concerning human existence. The second broad connection of the two disciplines in question is the idea that they both are constructions in language. Philosophy evaluates the method of concepts and clarifies them, while literature engages with those words to communicate ideas, thoughts and moral principles to enlarge perceived realities.

Moreover, the point which is influential and integrated to the above is the fact that both philosophy and literature reflect the societal status and development. The philosophy of an era tells the nature of that age likewise the literature of an epoch tells the problems and realities of that period. They both reflect the faith in human about same realities. In this regard, the aim of philosophy and literature both are founded in reality. If philosophy rejects reality then it abstracted in finding main self—who am I? So literature starts in reality or fact then proceed by imagination (not fantasy); it passes through creative process and becomes beautiful.

Another common view is precise in both areas as they seem to show the prediction of human lives as the future possibility of how human beings can survive long or meaningful or peaceful life without war, conflict, misunderstanding of illusion or hallucination, etc. Philosophical and literary trends are undergoing a rapid transformation of life—to understanding from misunderstanding, real from illusion, to truth from false, etc. They constantly put efforts to grasp the realities of life; they engage themselves with society or individual as a social unit. They are complacent with the singing of frustrated love; or with writing to satisfy only our sense of wonder; now they are concerned with the problems of our life and similar themes like an individual’s or a social value.<sup>23</sup>

Why do we need philosophy and literature? The authors seem to possess clearly—a sense of their perception, analysis and understanding of the world or human beings—for the latest discoveries of to-the-point scientific research which (unlike academics) they able to convey their general reader or audience in a simple, highly readable literature or prose. Further, they manage to generate and maintain the interest of the readers (unlike most philosophers) with their captivating literary genre or style, as well as through numerous examples, from real-life experience studies. So their engagement in literary career is to explicitly interpret philosophical notions from opaque of philosophical texts which is precise in Sartre’s works.

Sartre thought that much of what he had to say was best illustrated through concrete examples of people in real life situations. This is why he thought it worthwhile to also advance his philosophy through mediums of biography, literature and drama. His major philosophical work, *Being and*

<sup>21</sup>Munshi Premchand, “The Nature and Aims of philosophy”, p. 82.

<sup>22</sup>Wallyvikky, “The Relationship between Philosophy and Literature”, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup>The common expressions about the aims of philosophy and literature are highlighted in both articles of Henry Jones’ “The Nature and Aims of Philosophy”, p.165 and Munshi Premchand “The Nature and Purpose of Literature”, pp.82-3.

Nothingness, is full of concrete illustrations of people in real life situations that we can all relate to. Sartre often offers this concrete evidence to support his more abstract arguments and it is partly what makes him such an interesting philosopher to study.<sup>24</sup>

In this connection, we need philosophy and literature to convey specifically and rhetorically the philosophical ideas for common readers or audience. To impart explicitly the philosophical ideas, philosophers describe or elaborate their philosophical ideas through a particular narrative. People are interested in reading novels, dramas, plays, poems, short stories, etc. compare to the philosophical texts because we feel entertained while reading them. On the contrary, in their literary works, philosophers do not only intend to tell a story, and growing disparity of some major concerns, reflections, and dissimilarities ought to add not only to joy but also to the readers' explicit understanding of philosophical ideas.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, philosophers describe their profound ideas through a particular narrative or story-telling. It is easy to understand for general readers when their writings begin with a particular narrative and writers can also express their ideas without using such technical terms. The readers' mind also entertains to read the books when one explains his philosophical issues out of a particular story of the protagonist. It is not prevalent that an author has to write the philosophical texts to expound on his philosophical concepts. It is visible in Sartre's novel *Nausea*, the philosophical concepts are analyzed by the simple terms in the literary works into story-telling without using lots of technical terms.

In philosophical mode of interpretation, philosophers deeply ground the method of concepts and try to define their meanings within the particular theory. If philosophers do not engage into literary works, general readers find it difficult to understand. So they describe and clarify their philosophical concepts in a story-telling manner and try to simplify their meanings for easily understanding through a particular narrative. It is on this reminder that philosophy needs to engage with literature for explicate expression. The philosophical ideas of Sartre are clearly found in novel *Nausea* as he fictionalizes his imagined story. Thus, the philosophy and literature can enrich one another. Literature aesthetically assimilates and transmits philosophy communicated in the literary works as precise in the literary works of Plato, Descartes and Sartre.

## CONCLUSION

Sartre's philosophical ideas are clearly found in the novel *Nausea* in which the aims of philosophy has been discussed through various dimensions. Moreover, the aims of literature has also been broadly discussed above by the analytical explanations of several prominent philosophers. With the prime focus on the philosophical notions of Plato and Descartes, it can be established that there exists a contrasting analysis between the studies of philosophy and literature. Apparently, the writers explicitly describe their philosophical ideas through some of the literary works which is precisely stipulated in Sartre's literary works. But it is seen that the aims of philosophy seems to be somewhat different in the sense that it primarily focuses on the perceptions and analysis of the outcome of the study; and evaluates the method for better result in understanding of self and the world through which one can live humanly. While literature is a kind of narrative where it widely expresses the problems of the society in general. Critically, on the perusal from the above analysis, it can be concluded with an observation that there is a need of philosophy and literature still in the contemporary world to convey rhetorically the philosophical ideas for common readers and in the most fascinating way by means of literature for profound understanding of the esteem philosophical notions of the litterateurs.

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<sup>24</sup>Gary Cox, *Great Philosophers: From Socrates to Sartre*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>25</sup>Walter Kaufmann. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. p.104.

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