

HUMAN VALUES DEPICTED IN LITERATURE

By Pramila Khadun

Mauritius is a value based country at the core. Since ancient times, the Ramayana, the Vedas, Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita, just to mention a few have highlighted human values like love, brotherhood, care, compassion, peace, justice, charity and liberty. They serve as guides for human conduct and spiritual refinement ushering at the same time co – existence for growth and sustainable development.

As you all know literature is the mirror of society. The Bhagvad Gita, one of the most ancient and Extensive Literature in the world, revered by noted global writers, transcends time and space. It contributes to self-reflexion and organization management too. It is helpful in post modern society for people in all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, colour, creed or religious belief. It is up to the reader to extract values and put them into practice in his or her daily life.

Since, times immemorial, values depicted in Literature have pushed humanity ahead in an arena of civilization and culture Charles Dickens, the great novelist projected his protests against both the vicious men and institutions through his novels like ‘A tale of two cities’, ‘Oliver Twist’, ‘Great Expectations’ and so on. Some of his works of art were loud protest against social inequalities and inequities.

Going down memory lane, let us ponder over Don Quixote, a Spanish novel by Miguel de Cervante. It was published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615. A founding work of Western Literature, it is often labeled the first modern novel and many authors consider it to be the best literature work ever written. Cervantes travels through Spain, a champion for down-trodden, dispelling evil. Inspite of the numerous mishaps, the valiant knight does not give up. An epic

satire of all ages, it is an inspirational source of endurance for those who are seekers of glory and adventure with faith unwavering and spiritindomitable.

Similarly, Nobel Prize Winner in Literature, Ernest Hemingway has portrayed his allegory ‘The old man and the sea’ in a very brilliant manner. Thought – provoking , soul – stirring, this book clearly resonates with universalism of human identity. Man has unlimited powers in his hands and those powers need to be discovered by the individual. However hard the battle of life may be, we have to remain focused on the larger picture, discarding opposing factors and forces that want to spoil our dreams and aspirations. In short, Hemingway teaches readers that what we think of ourselves is more important than what others think of us. Sometimes, we are alone travelling rough paths and we should not give up for the destination is not far. Half the battle is lost for those who have fear in their hearts and those who are fearless are the genuine winners.

With new vistas or experiences opening up, writers across the globe have a wide choice of subject matter for literary expressions. For some writers, culture and society becomes the focal point, for others poetry while topics on science, politics, digital era, environment, water and so on are cropping up like mushrooms. A whole array of attitudes are exposed, like the ability to progress and innovation, the will power to bring change, create awareness about environment, fight against all types of pollution whether it is air, water, land and disposal of waste and even recycling of waste to make liveliwood safe and serendipitous. Very often, we hear that cleanliness is next to Godliness. Values about cleanliness, whether it is inside the home or outside the home have to be inculcated right at kindergarden level so that habits become deep-rooted. Undoubtedly, the great French writer Albert Camus has rightly said that ‘The greatness of an artist is measured by the balance the writer maintains between the value of creation and the values of humanity.’

Literacy works are forms, through which national races, cultural groups and communities recognize themselves. For example ‘Paul et Virginie’ written by Bernardin de saint Pierre is a fictional novel. This novel deals about two families and virginie, a white girl falls in love with

Paul, son of a slave. Inspite of differences, they love each other madly but unfortunately , Virginie`s aunt who opposes this sacred relationship sends Virginie to France. Their love defies all barriers and virginie comes back to Paul. However , a hurricane engulfs her and other passengers during a tragic shipwreck. And interestingly enough, this novel helps people across the world to visit the Paradise island of Mauritius. Similarly, a parallel can be drawn with India whereby another Nobel Prize Winner, Rabindranauth Tagore glorifies both his motherland Bharat and Literature by his magnus opus creation ‘Gitanjali’.

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States said ‘To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.’ Writers can pave the way for a new generation of people with innovative ideas.

Judging from the frequent reports of behavioural disorders among the young bullying, harassment, self centeredness, violence, suicide and hategroups and taking a look at some research clearly shows that in many school systems, children today are not being taught the simple values or virtues that are part and parcel of character education. Researchers and educators alike have found that character eduation can be incorporated in many school subjects, like social studies, history, physical education and the Art`s espcially Literature.

Research has further shown positive outcomes of using everyday Literature to teach character education at all grade Levels and development levels. Writers across the globe must be encouraged to produce more children Literature where values will be inculcated by poetry recital, drama, dance and music. Children are fast learners and they enjoy different ways of learning and working on their talents in ways different from the ‘talk and chalk method.’ Giving opportunity to children to work in groups enhances their development of human relationship and tolerance of peers coming from different socio – economic and cultural groups.

We can never underestimate the power of reading. Educator and Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda states, ‘ I believe that the means to encourage a flowering in the neglected inner lives of children will always be exposure to Literature and Arts.’

It is high time we resolved the conflict between the entrenched methods of teaching that emphasize academic content and performance in examinations to the detriment of whole person development which prepares our students to cope with real life issues.

Seeing the number of rapes, our hearts cry and yet, our reasoning faculty says that it is time for a wake up call. Boys must be given the opportunity both at home and in school to learn about respecting the opposite sex. Sex education must be compulsory in schools and colleges and there must be a thorough revision about attitudes towards sex. Where there is respect, there is awareness, there is no danger. Self – control is a virtue par excellence and this can be attained by right education. With the emergence of self – control, we can get rid of evils in society and women will walk heads held high.

John Dewey , American educational reformer said, ‘Education is not preparations for life, it is life itself.’

He goes further to say, ‘ We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience. And Literature allows you to do that. So, let’s give our students a head start in meaningful life at school with the Literature component. Using Literature helps develop sensitivity to Life`s values. Children`s Literature exposes students to real – life values such as honesty, fair play, patriotism, love and bravery as presented through stories, plots, setting, themes and characters. One thing educators must keep in mind is that Literary texts are not comprehension passages. In fact, children must be helped to discover for themselves the unique and beautiful ways in which emotions and values are represented in Literature.

Let us walk gracefully toward the scenic world of poetry which has mesmerized humanity and let us see how poetry may be used as an effective tool for the betterment of society as a whole. There is not only delight in poetry but ultimately wisdom flourishes. From a broader perspective,

poetry presents alternative ways of seeing and experiencing language. Nowadays, we have poetry endowed with freshness, sensuality and rich inventiveness, all embracing authorship imbued with clarity of thoughts and poetic intensity which provides a liberating image of the versatility of man. Such poets have revolutionized the architecture of poetry.

‘A poet is born, not made,’ says Samuel Coleridge.

Let us have a look at Kahlil Gibran. We see the aesthetic beauty of outstanding intellect in quite a number of his poems. They catch the dewdrop and reflect the cosmos. And it is not a marathon task to understand and analyze the human values depicted in each and every poem. Here are a few lines about his poem on ‘Love’

When love beckons to you, follow him,
Through his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you , yield to him,
Through the sword hidden among
His pinions may wound you

It is clearly shown in the opening lines that true love is painful and lovers have to surrender before the bliss is experienced.

As far as marriage is concerned, he says,

You were born together
And together you shall be for evermore.
You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days.
And you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.
But let there be spaces in your togetherness.

Here the poet reveals to couples that there should not be too much attachment as such a situation creates pain. Nowadays, marriage has become such a fragile and unpredictable institution that we cannot place all our trust in it. So, some sort of preparedness is always good under shaky conditions. Conclusively, values depicted in this particular poem is togetherness and yet some preservation of one’s identity has to be kept.

Another poet whom many of us value lots and have great respect for is Rumi, the thirteenth century persian philosopher, mystic, scholar and poet of transcendental power.

The themes – tolerance, goodness, the experience of God, charity and awareness through love – still resonate with millions of readers around the world.

This is an extract from Rumi's poem 'Emptiness'

When you are with everyone but me, you are with no one.

When you are with no one but me, you are with everyone.

Instead of being so bound up with everyone, be everyone.

When you become that many, you're nothing empty.

In this lovely extract, readers learn about the fullness and emptiness love and companionship cretae. Love is the most beautiful emotion that exists. Shakespeare has beautifully expressed it in the world famous love story Romeo and Juliet.

Last but not the least, look at the patriotic fervor Atal Bihari Vajpayee expresses in his poem 'We will not bend.'

We will not bend, through we may break.

Truth does battle with power,

Justice stands up to Tyranny;

Darkness has thrown down a challenge,

And now the last ray fades.

Writers and poets, it gives me immense pleasure to include a short poem written by me and freedom is yours to analyze it.

The title is 'Wherever'

Wherever you will go,

You will find me there.

If you find me not,

Leave not your foot,

Wait for me.

I will not be long

To be back,
For I will plead to the wind
To lend me her wings.
She understands me
As much as you do
For she is love
Fast tract.

Now, let us have a look at story telling which is an important component of Literature.

In the 60's storytelling was very common. They were usually related by grand mothers either by the fireside or while lying on the same bed. Imbued with love, security, curiosity and warmth, stories were the only distraction or a break from daily routine. From these stories, children learn values like honesty, bravery, patriotism, endurance and so on. They see how virtuous characters are rewarded and how wrong doers are punished. Stories which depict values like loyalty, self-control, compassion, tolerance, firmness, respect, responsibility and so on create positive vibes in social and psychological development of children. Negative traits like selfishness, cruelty, lying, cheating, robbing on the other hand have adverse effects.

Stories not only give insights into human emotions but exercise and enhance our effective and cognitive abilities. It stimulates the emotional intelligence of children who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

BIO:

Pramila Khadun is a poetess from the island of Mauritius. She holds a degree in Food Science from S.N.D.T Women's University, Pune, India and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education(P.G.C.E) from the Mauritius Institute of Education. She had been Head of Department of Food Studies Department at Modern College and part time lecturer at the Mauritius Institute of Education. Her first poem, 'Open me the gates of a world different' appeared in S.N.D.T University magazine which won the best article prize.