

Idea of Nation in American Literature

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Abstract

Literature is the artistic expression of thought, which is replete with feelings and imagination. It is one of the instruments, and one of the most powerful instruments, for forming character, for giving us, characters armed with reason, braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage, and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue of which it has been well said that they are the brightest ornaments of the mind of man. It can be observed from various angles. In its comprehensive sense it includes all the activities of the human soul in general, or within a particular sphere, period, country, or language. It is the representation of social life. It is the reflection of life. It represents and communicates experience by means of language.

Key Words: Literature, Imagination, Comprehension, Representation, Reflection.

Introduction

Literature is the mirror of society and it is true for all nations. In American literature we can find the society-----its status, its reformation, follies and foibles etc. of the same nation. To quote Lamborn: "To a poet in a lover's mood, the sea smiles with him in his joy, the winds whisper the name of his beloved, the stars look down on him like friendly eyes to the same poet in another mood, the same sea looks grim and cruel, the winds mock his sighs and the cold stars watch him with a passionless inscrutable gaze." According to Hudson,"A nation's life has its moods of exultation and depression; its epochs a strong faith and strenuous idealism, now of doubt, struggle and disillusion, now of unbelief and flippant disregard for the sanctities of existence; and while the manner of expression will vary greatly with the individuality of each writer, the dominant spirit of the hour, whatever that may be, will directly or indirectly reveal itself in his work." A new spirit for us is created when we study literature as a reflection of the spirit of the age. Literature and society are interrelated. If literature is separated from society then it will become improper. It is a social phenomenon. Everything is involved in the making of our nation's life and is also involved in the texture of its literature.

Objectives and Methodology

The objective of the paper is to make an analysis of the idea of nation in American literature. The methodology used here is analytical and the help of secondary sources like books, journals etc. have been taken.

Discussion

A country's physical, cultural, social, political, psychological and literary background always affects its literature; and this is very true in case of American literature also. Rebellion against conventions and a tendency towards Iconoclasm influenced modern literature chiefly. Modern American literature expresses the personal vision and thereby embodies the American message. We are on the road to civilization due to the American writers' preoccupation with the spiritual and moral concerns of life.

For example, we can take William Butler Yeats' poetry into account. His poetry tells us of the background of the world war and other wars too. Inspired and instigated by these wars he wrote some of his best poems. In order he met Maud Gonne his all-time beloved at the time of crisis. In order to show his deep love for the martyrs he wrote poems or elegies for them.

As it is obvious that a writer writes what he sees around him and thus tries to portrait the same picture in front of the readers and in doing so he knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly brings in front the contemporary society of his own time. We can cite another example of Ernest Hemingway, an American writer of the age. Through his writings he has given us ample examples and points to know and judge the Americans of that time. In his most interesting novel ‘The Old Man and The Sea’, he has tried to show the dignity, the tolerance, the mental strength and the conquerable minds of the Americans through the character of Santiago the aged hero and the old fisherman. It can thus be known that the Americans with such a big nation have got a big heart too.

The follies and the lamentation for the follies are clearly shown in William Butler Yeats’ poem ‘Sailing To Byzantium’ where the poet laments the old city and curses the new one. He is reminded of the old Byzantium, the holy city where he now wants to go and take rest as he is fed up with the new, unholy and wasted piece of land as there is left o sanity in that.

Conclusion

The literature of every age shows the very perfect picture of the nation itself. The political strata, the day-to-day happenings, the progress and doom both can be well read through the literature. The follies are greatly satirized and a poetic judgment is maintained in the piece of writing.

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