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DEFINITION & ELEMENTS OF NOVEL

(Explained by Dr. Vipul V. Kapoor, Associate Professor)

“A short story is a photograph, a novel is a film.”

INTRODUCTION:

Though being the latest form of literature (emerged during the 18th century), Novel is the most popular and widely loved and read form of literature around the world. After 18th century, the reading of novels had become a fashion, almost a mania among the upper class women in England. The novel had become what cinema became in 1920s onwards. It proved to be a window to the world of entertainment.

Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Stern prepared a strong foundation of this new genre/form of English literature during the 18th century which was developed further by Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Emily Bronte and others during the 19th century. Novel holds some important elements like plot, characters. Setting, philosophy of life, dialogues, narrative techniques etc.

ORIGIN OF NOVEL:

- Ancient Greek epics long narrative stories of great



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historical figures in poetic form.

- Ancient Ballads narrated the folk tales in poetic form.
- Boccaccio (14th century), an Italian author wrote 'Decameron', a collection of stories in prose.
- Geoffrey Chaucer (14th century) wrote two stories in prose, namely,
- John Bunyan, Aphra Ben, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and others popularized prose literature during the 18th and 19th centuries.

DEFINITION OF NOVEL:

Hundreds of critics and scholars have tried to define novel in different ways. However some things are common among all definitions. Let's take a glance at some of the most famous definitions.

1. Anonymous: "Novel is a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length, in which realist characters and events are presented in a complex plot."
2. Webster's Dictionary: "Novel is an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events."
3. Henry James: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life."



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4. Albert Camus: “A novel is never anything but a philosophy put into images.”
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Every novel is a debtor to Homer.”

In this way, we may say that novel is a newly invented form of English literature which narrates an imaginative story. It is written in about more than 100 pages. Though it is an imaginative story, it deals with real life characters and events and presents some philosophy of life. These events are presented in a complex plot.

ELEMENTS OF NOVEL:

1. THEME / PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE
2. CHARACTERS
3. PLOT CONSTRUCTION
4. SETTING
5. CONFLICT

THEME / PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE: Theme or the central idea is the heart and soul of any work of art. The novelist writes his novels with some specific purpose. He expresses his vision of life, his philosophy of life through



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the actions and characters in his novels.

Ernest Hemingway wrote 'Old Man and the Sea' and presents a nice philosophy of life, "Man is not made for defeat, man can be destroyed, but not defeated."

Roy Bennett wrote 'The Light in the Heart' and expressed this idea, "If you believe very strongly in something, stand up and fight for it."

CHARACTERS: Since novel is a long narrative story in which real life events are presented, it cannot exist without characters. Characters, minor and major, play an important role to develop the story. Here, the novelist presents flat and round characters. Mostly, the major characters or the protagonist and antagonists are round characters and minor ones are flat characters. In fact, the success of the novel depends on how well the characters are developed. In English literature, we have many immortal characters like Pip in 'Great Expectations', Santiago in 'Old Man and the Sea', Pamela, Harry Potter etc.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION: "Plot is a series of events logically connected with one another." The novelist has to arrange all actions or events in a logical manner so as to



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create realistic effect. If the events are presented in a haphazard manner, it creates confusion in the mind of the reader and the novel fails. There are three types of plot:

- **Simple Plot**, having one main story
- **Episodic Plot**, having events with no logical connection
- **Complex Plot**, one main plot and one or more sub-plots

SETTING: The background in which the story and events take place is known as setting. It includes two major aspects:

- **Place:** Since novels are lengthy, the story may move from one place to another. The novels must clearly describe these places so as to create a proper picture of the places in the reader's mind. But too many places might sometimes create confusion among the readers.
- **Time:** The story may take place in past, present or future. The novelist has to stick to the social, economic and political conditions of the time which



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he presents in his novel. Sometimes the novelist presents flashbacks of time. The story moves from present to past and back to present again. But too many flashbacks might create confusion.

CONFLICT: The struggle between two different forces is called conflict. De facto, the element of conflict makes the story more interesting and lively. There are various types of conflicts found in novel.

- A character struggling against nature
- A struggle between two or more characters
- A struggle between the main character and the whole society
- A struggle of opposing forces within one character

CONCLUSION: Hence, we may summarize by saying that novel is a form of English literature which narrates a story in length. It presents the internal as well as external conflicts of the real life characters. The ultimate aim of the novelist is to present his philosophy of life which has universal appeal.

