



First Lecture

The Puritan Age (1600-1660)

The Literature of the Seventeenth Century may be divided into two periods- The Puritan Age or the Age of Milton (1600-1660) which is further divided into **the Jacobean and Caroline periods** after the names of the rulers James I and Charles I, was ruled from 1603 to 1625 and 1625 to 1649 respectively; and the Restoration Period or the Age of Dryden (1660-1700). The Seventeenth Century was marked by **the decline** of the Renaissance spirit, and the writers either imitated the great masters of Elizabethan period or followed new paths.

This spirit may be defined as the spirit of **observation** and of preoccupation with details, and a systematic analysis of facts, feelings and ideas. In other words, it was the spirit of **science** popularized by such great men as Newton, Bacon and Descartes. **In the field of literature** this spirit manifested itself in the form of criticism which in England is the creation of the Seventeenth Century.

*One very important and significant feature of this new spirit of observation and analysis was the popularization of the art of **biography** (an account of someone's life) which was unknown during the Sixteenth Century. Thus whereas we have no recorded information about the life of such an eminent dramatist as Shakespeare, in the Seventeenth Century many*

authors like Fuller and Aubrey collected and chronicled the smallest facts about the great men of their own day, or of the immediate past.

*The Seventeenth Century up to 1660 was dominated by **Puritanism***

*and it may be called **the Puritan Age or the Age of Milton** who*

was the noblest representative of the Puritan spirit. The Puritan movement stood for liberty of the people from the shackles of the despotic ruler as well as the introduction of morality and high ideals in politics. Thus it had two objects – personal righteousness and civil and religious liberty.

In other words, it aimed at making men honest



and free. Milton and Cromwell were the real champions of liberty and stood for toleration.



The name Puritans was at first given to those who advocated certain changes in the form of worship of the reformed English church under Elizabeth. As King Charles I and his councilors, as well as some of the clergymen with Bishop Laud as their leader, were opposed to this movement, Puritanism in course of time became a national movement against the tyrannical rule of the king and stood for the liberty of the people.

In literature of the Puritan age, John Milton was the noblest representative of the Puritan spirit to which he gave a most lofty and enduring expression.

A- Puritan poetry.

The puritan poetry, also called the Jacobean and Caroline poetry during the reigns of James I Charles I respectively, **can be divided into three parts**

- 1-Poetry of the school of Spenser
- 2-Poetry of the Metaphysical school
- 3-Poetry of the Cavalier


George Herbert(1593-1633) is the most widely read of all poets belonging to the metaphysical school except Donne. This is due to the clarity of his expression and the transparency of his conceits. In his religious verse there is simplicity as well as natural earnestness. Mixed with the didactic strain there is also a current of quaint humor in his poetry.

Milton was the greatest poet of the Puritan age. His early poetry is lyrical. When the Civil War broke out in 1642, Milton threw himself heart and soul in the struggle against King Charles I. He devoted the best years of his life, when his poetical powers were at their peak to this national movement. Finding himself unfit to fight as a soldier he became the **Latin Secretary to Cromwell**.

This work he continued to do till 1649, when Charles I was defeated and commonwealth was proclaimed under Cromwell. But when he returned to poetry to accomplish the ideal he had in his mind, Milton found himself completely blind.

Moreover, after the death of Cromwell





and the coming of Charles II to the throne, Milton became friendless. His own wife and daughters turned against him. But undaunted by all these misfortunes, Milton wrote **his greatest poetical works- Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes.**

B-Jacobean and Caroline Drama

After Shakespeare the drama in England suffered a decline during the reigns of James I and Charles I. The heights reached by Shakespeare could not be kept by later dramatists. The Jacobean and Caroline dramatists gave expression to passive suffering and lack of mental and physical vigor.

Thus in the hands of these dramatists of the inferior type the romantic drama which had achieved great heights during the Elizabethan period, suffered a terrible decline, and when the Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, it died a natural death. The greatest **dramatist** of the Jacobean period was **Ben Jonson.**

C-Jacobean and Caroline Prose

This period was rich in prose. The great prose writers were Bacon, Burton, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor and Clarendon. For the first time the great scholars began to write in English rather than Latin. So the Bible became the supreme example of earlier English prose style- simple, plain and natural.





Some questions Samples

1- The literature of the Seventeenth Century may be divided into..... Periods.

- A- two
- B- three
- C- Four
- D- Five

2- The Puritan Age is divided into

- A- the Jacobean period
- B- the Caroline period
- C- the Caroline period the Jacobean periods
- D- the Jacobean , the Caroline and the Shakespearean periods.

3- The Seventeenth Century was marked by the of the Renaissance spirit.

- A- flourishing
- B- increase
- C- rise
- D- decline

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