

UNIT - II :

Literary Features of Neo-classical Age :

INTRODUCTION :

Neo-classical literature was written between 1660 and 1798. This time period is broken down into three parts:

- * The Restoration Period,
- * The Augustan Period,
- * The Age of Johnson.

Writers of the Neoclassical period tried to imitate the style of the Romans and Greeks. This was also an era of The Enlightenment. It was preceded by The Renaissance and followed by the Romantic era.

Characteristics of Neoclassical Literature :

Neoclassical literature is characterized by order, accuracy and structure. In direct opposition to Renaissance attitudes, the Neoclassical writers portrayed man as inherently flawed. This was a time when conservatism flourished in both politics and literature.

Some popular types of literature included:

- * Parody
- * Essays
- * Satire
- * Letters
- * Fables
- * Melodrama
- * Rhyming with Couplets

Restoration Period (1660-1700) :

Restoration Period marks the British king's restoration to the throne after a long period of Puritan domination in England. Its symptoms include the dominance of French and classical influences on Poetry and drama.

Restoration literature continued to appeal to heroic ideals of love and honor, particularly on stage, in hero tragedy.

Famous Writers :

John Dryden:

Dryden was the most influential writer of the Restoration, for he wrote in every form important to the period - occasional verse, Comedy, tragedy, heroic plays, Odes, satires, translations of classical works and produced influential critical essays.

Famous Compositions :

- * All for Love,
- * A Prologue and an Epilogue

John Milton, Sir William Temple, John Locke, Samuel Pepys and Jean Racine were other famous writers during this period.

The Augustan Age (1700-1750):

It is called Augustan because King George I wanted people to think he was like Augustus Caesar.

This period is marked by the imitation of Virgil and Horace's literature in English letters.

Famous Writers:

Alexander Pope:

Pope was the most significant figure in poetry during the Augustan Period. His Witty Couplets were often quoted and used as axioms.

Famous Compositions:

* Rape of Locke by Alexander Pope

* Gulliver's Travel by Jonathan Swift.

Jonathan Swift & Joseph Addison, were some of the other famous writers during this period.

The Age of Johnson (1750-1790):

This period marks the transition towards the upcoming Romanticism though the period is still largely Neoclassical.

The American and French Revolution marked a transition in English literature from the structure and formality of the Neoclassical writers to the emotional, ungoverned writings of the Romantics.

Famous Writers:

Samuel Johnson:

Johnson was the literary dictator of the age, though he was not a greatest writer he had his own style of writing.

Famous Composition:

* Lives of Poets by Samuel Johnson

* The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon.

* Elegy Written in a Country churchyard by Thomas Gray.

Edward Gibbon, Thomas Gray, Robert Burns, Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin were the other famous writers of this age.

Conclusion :

The Neo-classical era in literature brought a sense of decorum and stability to writers. There were rules to be carefully followed and there were structures to be upheld. People praised wit and parody. It was a time of careful moral appearances.

Neoclassical Poetry :

John Dryden (1631-1700)

INTRODUCTION :

John Dryden was an English poet, literary critic, translator and playwright who was made **England's first Poet Laureate** in 1668. He was dominating the literary life of Restoration England, hence the period was also called as "The Age of Dryden." Sir Walter Scott called him as "**Glorious John**".

His Life :

Dryden was born near Oundle in Northamptonshire. He began his education at Oundle Grammar School. Later he entered Westminster School and went to Cambridge. For forty years, he continued to produce an abundance of literary works of every kind - poems, plays and prose works.

The quality of his work was almost unfailingly good.

His Poetry:

Dryden began his life's work with poetry; he concluded it with poetry; and the year between are starred with the brightness of his greater poems. His first published poem was a series of heroic stanza on the death of the Protector Oliver Cromwell (1659). In 1660, he made a great step forward in poetical craftsmanship by publishing *Astroeca Redux*, in celebration of Charles II return. *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) is one of his poetical work which gives an account of the Great Fire and the War with the Dutch. "Absalom and Achitophel" and "The Medal" are the political poems produced by him.

A new poetical development was manifest in "Religio Laici" (1682) and "The Hind and The Panther" (1687).

The first poem is a thesis in support of the English church and the second poem is an allegorical defence of the Roman Catholic faith.

Dryden's lyrical poetry though is small in bulk it is of much important. The best known pieces are "Song for St Cecilia's Day" (1687) "Alexander's Feast" (1697) Both of these

pieces proves Dryden as a master of melodious verse and of a varied and powerful style.

His Drama:

He succeeded as a dramatist by his works like "All for Love", "Aureng-zeb's Sebastian" and Cleomenes.

"All for Love" is in blank verse and is considered as his dramatic masterpiece.

Reputation and influence:

Dryden was the dominant literary figure and influence of his age. He established the heroic couplet as a standard form of English poetry. He also introduced the alexandrine and triplet into the form. Dryden's heroic couplet became the dominant poetic form of the 18th Century.

Alexander Pope was heavily influenced by Dryden. John Keats admired the "Fables", and imitated them in his poem "Lamia". Lord Byron, Walter Scott, T.S. Eliot were the other writers who were influenced by Dryden.

Conclusion:

His numerous prologues and epilogues written in couplets shows abundant wit and vivacity. As Pepys recorded in his diary, Dryden remained "Mr Dryden, the poet" till the day of his death.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

INTRODUCTION:

Alexander Pope is regarded as one of the greatest English poets, and the foremost poet of the early 18th century. He belongs to the Augustan Age.

His Life:

Pope was born in London, the only son of a considerable city tradesman. He was puny and delicate and was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith. He was educated privately. From his earliest youth, he was passionate of making his name as an author. His youth was passed at Binfield, his father's small estate near Windsor Forest. His translation of Homer brought him wealth. His life came to an end in 1744.

His Character:

In case of Pope it is necessary to analyse his character. One saw him as 'a good and exceedingly lovable man' and others saw him as aggressive and spiteful. His character was gravely affected by his physical weakness and mental agony of his enemies. He combined a sensitiveness to criticism and a pride ~~in~~ in his own artistic gifts.

His poetry:

Pope's earliest important work was his Pastorals, published in 1709. The characters and scenery are based on classical models. In 1711 he wrote An Essay on Criticism, a heroic couplets. Windsor Forest (1713) is another pastorals written by him.

The Rape of the Lock, one of the most brilliant poems in the language was published in 1712. It has a flawless, airy grace and a sustained lightness of touch which are unparalled in literature.

Between 1731 and 1735, Pope published a series of philosophical poems, including To Lord Bathurst, Of the Use of Riches, Of the Knowledge and Character of Men, Of the characters of Women and the most famous, An Essay on Man.

The year 1733 and 1737 mark Pope's last important period of production. He produced his Imitations of Horace. His famous Prologue to the Satires, better known by its other title, Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot (1735), contains some of his most brilliant and finished work. (Masterpieces)

Conclusion:

(a) Both in subject and in style his poems are limited.

(b) His work is powerful and effective.

(c) He was a great artist.

(d) His use of the heroic couplet marks a great change from that of Dryden.

Thus, Alexander Pope has established a place for himself as a poet and as a critic of the Neo-classical Age.