

B. A. English (Honours) Part-I

Paper-I

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Neoclassicism in English Literature

- ❖ The neoclassic period of English literature is usually taken to be the hundred odd years (1660-1780) that is from the maturity of John Dryden to the death of Dr. Samuel Johnson (1784).
- ❖ This literary period is further divided in three parts: the Restoration period (1660-1700), the Augustan period (1700-1750), and the Age of Johnson (1750-1798).
- ❖ This was also the era of Enlightenment which put emphasis on the importance of logic and reason.
- ❖ In literary theory and practice most writers of this period were traditionalist and they had great respect for the Greek and Roman authors, especially the Romans, who, as per their belief, had established and perfected the principal literary genres for all time. It was, in a sense, a resurgence of classical taste and sensibility.
- ❖ Literature was regarded as an art, in which excellence could be attained only by prolonged study. They thought the rules of this art could best be learnt from close study of the classical authors and by careful imitation of their works.
- ❖ They thought that reason and judgement were the most admirable faculties (18th century was the Age of Reason) and that decorum was essential. In prose, as in verse, the most desirable qualities were order, accuracy, harmony, balance, proportion and restraint. It follows that the Neo-classical writers aimed at correctness. And the result was the heroic couplet.
- ❖ Man, man in society, man in his social environment and above all the general and representative characteristics of mankind were the preoccupations of the poets. Dr. Johnson summarised it all in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.
- ❖ They frequently use satire as a means of corrective. It was a means of controlling folly, stupidity and corruption.
- ❖ They aimed to maintain good moral orders and literary discipline. As Pope wrote in his *Essay on Man*, "Order is Heaven's first law".

- ❖ They have some sort of moral obligation to instruct as well as to please.
- ❖ Some of the most famous writers of this age are John Dryden (1631-1700), Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), and Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). Comedy of Manners, Satires and Mock-epic were some of the most popular genres of this period.

Sources-

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