

Notes for B. A. English (Hons.) Part- I

Periods of English Literature- II

Dr. Anand Bhushan Pandey
Assistant Professor
Department of English
S. B. College, Ara

N. B. – This topic is in continuation with the earlier one entitled “**Periods of English Literature: A General Introductory Classification**”

The **Old English Period**, or the **Anglo-Saxon Period** starts with the invasion (armed forces entering a country or territory) of Celtic (Celts were the members of a West European people, some of whom settled in Britain) England by Germanic tribes (the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) in around 450 AD and ends with the conquest of England in 1066 AD by the Norman French under the leadership of William the Conqueror. The Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity in the seventh century. After this conversion they began to develop written literature as before that their literature had been oral. Latin was the standard language of international scholarship at that time and the 8th century churchmen Bede and Alcuin were the major scholars who wrote in Latin. The epic *Beowulf*, the authorship of which is still unknown, is the most important work of art written in the vernacular Anglo-Saxon, known also as Old English. Besides Caedmon and Cynewulf were other important poets of the period who wrote on religious and biblical themes. Alfred the Great, a West Saxon king, who himself translated into old English various books of Latin prose, was not only a warrior but also a patron of literature of this period.

Middle English Period (1066-1500)- This period starts with the Norman Conquest in 1066, which effected the radical changes in the language, life and culture of England and ends in about 1500, when the standard literary language had become recognizably ‘modern English’- that is very close to the language we speak and write today. This period can further be subdivided into two periods. The first one is Anglo-Norman Period (1100-1350). It is named so because most of the literature of that time was written mainly in Anglo-Norman, the French dialect spoken by the then ruling class of England. Marie de France’s *Lais*, and Guillaume de Lorris’ and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* are among the important and

influential works from this period. The second part of this period can roughly be named as the age of Chaucer and the language of the literature of this period was **Middle English**, which descended from Anglo-Saxon and in which extensive lexical (words and phrases) and syntactic (related to the rules of grammar) elements were assimilated from Anglo-Norman. This was also the age of John Gower and of William Langland's great religious and satirical poem *Piers Plowman*. The most remarkable prose romance was Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. It was the flowering time of the *miracle* and *morality* plays and also of *folk ballads*.

Sources and Recommendations for further Reading:-

Abrams, M. H. and G. G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Cengage, 2015.

Nayar, Pramod K. *A Short History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Foundation, 2014.