

UNIT- 7

PURITAN AGE-1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS

STRUCTURE :

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction and Background of Puritan Age

7.2 Characteristics of Puritans age

7.3 Socio-Political and Literary Background

7.3.1 Jacobeans

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall discuss

- the background of the puritan age
- characteristics of Puritan Literature

On completing the unit, you should be able to,

- Comprehend the entire Puritan age; politically, socially and literary
- become well acquainted with the various types of literature prevailed in this specific era

7.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF PURITAN AGE

The Puritan age left the biggest impact on the history of English literature. It begins with the accession of King James VI of Scotland and James I of England in 1603. It was the second and greater renaissance; rebirth of moral nature of man and the intellectual awakening. Puritan age was marked by the decline of renaissance age and age of revival of knowledge. Puritan age is divided into three periods; Jacobeans-James I as ruler (1603-1625), Caroline-Charles I as ruler (1625-1649) and Commonwealth period (1649-1660) Oliver Cromwell as the Lord Protector. The king was against the parliament. He was not willing to entertain the Right of Petition, which heralded taxation unsanctioned by parliament as illegal and he ruled for eleven years without parliament.

Civil War was the central phenomena in the Puritan age. Oliver Cromwell was supported by church and allowed sects to worship as they pleased. The central aim of the Puritans was the purification of religious practice and to make man free and honest. The Puritans, in their efforts to purify the psyche of the people by force and they closed theatres for the same and saw displeasure upon dance, music, the art and other pleasures; therefore, anger prevailed among the common-man and it showed the seeds of hatred against them. Civil War, Biblical influences, lack of vitality and concreteness, lack of spirit of unity, Dominance of critical and intellectual spirit; are the chief characteristics the Puritan age. In literature of the Puritan Age we find the translations trending. Bible translation cleared the notion of religion. The Bible was available to all. A conversational tone emerges in the Jacobean literature and money, property and class were the main theme of the Puritan age. In addition, there was a new frankness about sexuality and sexual relations. Virtue, evil, faith and human corruption were the subject of many prose works. We observe the development of poetry in this era; earlier it was restricted to some specific subject and it was written on by the elite class of the society; while in the Puritan age, the Metaphysical poetry and Caroline poetry emerged made great impact on the history of the English poetry. The Metaphysical had the concern with ordinary class of the society. They were the reformer of the society through original religious thoughts. The Metaphysical poetry had theme of both great religious fervour and human love/sensually, often combining the two in the same poem. Their metaphors were called conceit. Faith, repentance, spiritual progress, perseverance and grace were the central theme of Caroline religious poetry.

7.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PURITANS AGE

Civil war:

Puritan Age - the entire period was dominated by the civil war. It divided the people into two factions, first, who were loyal to the king and second, the people against the king. It affected social, political and religious institutions of England. The crisis began when James I began to give too much importance to the church, and ignored the Parliament, which had created him. The puritans therefore welcomed the movement of constitutional reform. Thus, from 1642, a hostile period began in England, which continued till 1649 when Charles I was executed. However, even after that for eleven long years, England experienced political instability. These eleven years saw the establishment of Commonwealth and the rise of Oliver Cromwell.

Biblical Influences:

Puritan literature relied on biblical allusions, or references to biblical events or characters, were used heavily in puritan writing. Many authors would compare themselves or current struggles; to hardships endured by characters illustrated in the Bible. The Bible was the main source of inspiration for the writers. We can see one of the most prominent works

of literature 'Paradise Lost' by John Milton as a perfect example of this biblical aspect of the puritan age.

To make Men honest and free:

It aimed to make men honest and free. This is the ultimate feature of Puritan literature. There should not be any Monarch to rule over. But at the same time should not forget that Men should be extremely honest. The morality, the ethical part of the human being cannot be done away with. Though the spirit of the Puritanism was definitely religious, yet, the puritans were not religious sect. Thus, the Puritanism simply was a movement put into place by the men who thought and who felt and behave that morality is all important.

Lack of Vitality and Concreteness:

The literature of this period lacks in concreteness and vitality. In the preceding Age - Elizabethan Age Shakespeare had always stood for concrete realities of life. His words and phrases were always full of vitality, thrill and warmth. But poets Milton were more concerned with theorizing about life. They were not concern about the pleasure of life, they were not concern about what it takes to live life and literature with great strength, vitality so and so forth. Milton's lines impress us with their stateliness and power, but do not move us as passion. Thus, there is Majesty in Milton's poetry, but seldom lines that thrill or showcase warmth of humanity.

Lack of spirit of unity:

Despite its diversity, Elizabethan marked by a spirit of unity. The spirit of unity resulted from intense patriotism and rationalism of all classes. It also was the result of devotion and loyalty to the Queen. The Queen was sincerely dedicated towards the welfare of her subjects. However, during this period, both James I and Charles II were least bothered about the people of England. They were only bothered about their own convictions, their luxuries as well as their own philosophy. In fact, both Monarchs were hostile to the interest of their subjects. They didn't care what was happening to the people. If there were diseases the Monarch will not help, if there were government failure the Monarch will not consider himself responsible. The entire country was decided by the struggle for political and religious liberty. Literature too was therefore equally divided in spirit patriotic feelings could hardly be raised by the literature of this age.

Dominance of critical and intellectual spirit:

Instead of the romantic spirit that pervaded the Elizabethan literature, in this age, the critical and intellectual spirit was pre-dominant. W.J. Long the well-known critic said that "In the literature of the puritan period one looks in vain for romantic ardor." Even in the lyrics and the love poems, a critical and intellectual spirit takes over. Whatever romance asserted itself was in the form and not in feelings. We find a fantastic and artificial adornment of speech rather than the natural utterance of the heart.

Literature and poetry in particular appealed to the morals, rather than to the sentiments.

Literary characteristics of the Puritan age

Prose

❖ Features of Jacobean prose

- Translations became very popular during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.
- Some of the writers were interested in science and learning.
- There were great deal of interest in human psychology and behavior
- Virtue, Evil, faith and human corruption were the subject of many prose works, especially sermons and religious writing by priests such as John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes.
- Human character and society was the subject of many prose works. Character books classified human into various types.
- Travelers' tales, such as the Richard Hakluyt (edited) anthology, documented their experience of other culture and geographical regions.
- There was an interest in geography. Histories of the world and maps were increasingly printed and sold.
- There were pamphlets, lengthy prose works and essays on education, knowledge (both true and false), wisdom, culture and other social conditions from major writers such as Bacon and Milton.

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Drama

❖ Features of Jacobean drama

- A new conversational tone emerges in Jacobean drama. The Elizabethan used rhetoric that highly stylized while the Jacobean used everyday speech.
- The main themes are money, property and class. In addition, there is a new frankness about sexuality and sexual relations.
- While there is quite a lot of moralizing, there is also a secret fascination with the wicked and the corrupt. It is vice that creates the drama in the play.
- Moral and sexual corruption is a constant theme in Jacobean drama, especially in the tragedies.
- Jacobean drama is characterized by its realism and taste for satire
- The most common themes include lust, adultery, corruption, death, sickness (both physical and mental), and exploitation of the weak, the cruelty of the aristocrats and upper classes, the eccentricities of human beginnings, the hypocrisy of people, dishonesty and family crises.
- The playwrights used to include comments and addresses to the audience explaining the motive of characters or the psychology that causes them to behave in certain ways.

Non – fiction

❖ Features of Caroline non-fiction

- Highly personal.
- A degree of skepticism about religious and philosophical truth, best seen in the work of Thomas Browne.
- Influenced by the intellectual movements and figures of the age: Pascal Montaigne, Descartes, etc.
- An interesting mix of science and philosophy as well as science and religion in almost all the writing of this period.
- The writing were usually on controversial issues such as faith and the 'right' religion
- The debates between reason and Faith gather fresh intensity and actually marks the early moments of European Enlightenment thought.
- Also influenced by the discoveries being made about other cultures and world through European travels in Asia and Africa.

The Spenserian Poetry

❖ Features of Spenserian poetry

- Preferred pastoral themes and subject
- Wrote narrative poetry
- Idealized the 'golden age' of the old England.
- Also wrote political, moral and religious allegories like Spenser's The Faerie Queen.

The Metaphysical Poetry

❖ Features of Metaphysical poetry

- Unusual logic images which were exaggerated and not always easy to understand
- The metaphors were strange and artificial and were called 'conceits'
- A mixture of wit and seriousness
- A poetry of both great religious fervour and human love/sensually, often combining the two in the same poem (Donne's poem are examples)
- The use of irony and paradox, which makes it difficult to decide whether the poet is being serious or casual

The religious poetry

❖ Features of Caroline religious poetry

- Faith, repentance, spiritual progress, perseverance and grace and the central theme of Caroline religious poetry
- It explores the tension worldly human desires and the will of God as well as the needs of the body and the call to spiritual duties.
- All the poets declare their inner turmoil in unconditionally accepting the word of God.

- Introspective and very personal, the poets are rarely interested in the large issues of religion culture. Their poetry is about a very personal experience of faith and religion.

The Cavalier poetry

❖ Features of cavalier poetry

- Gallantry and chivalry are central to the cavaliers
- The poetry was full of wit, smart responses to situation and clever complimentary remarks to the lover
- Flattery and high praise of the love's beauty and wisdom become integral to this kind of poetry
- The poets often complain about their lover's indifference. There is also the agony of separation in many of the poems
- A lot of eroticism is visible there
- Unlike the metaphysic, the cavaliers did not engage in serious debates and their poetry is much more simple, simple than the metaphysical poetry of Donne and others
- The lines in these poems are almost always short and precise, though the images may seem exaggerated today.

7.3 SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

7.3.1 Jacobeans

The puritan surge began in the Elizabethan age resulted in the Westminster assembly. And after the death of Elizabeth 1603, James VI of Scotland becomes the James I of England. He brought up a Presbyterian. Robert Catesby and a group of provincial catholic, tried to assassinate the king and they got arrested by the king; was known as Gunpowder plot. Plot is discovered and the conspirators were executed.

James wants to divine rights of the king in his Kingdom. There will be no bishop or priest between god & man. He determined to make English church subservient to his will, and ill-treatment with puritans. He wished a match between Charles I, and Infanta, daughter of the King of Spain. The princess had jilted Charles and so he turned to Henrietta Maria who was daughter of the French king Louis XIII and sister of future Louis XIV. She was a Catholic. People of England were frightened with the speculations about Henrietta Maria, as she might convert the King and create legacy of Catholic faith. This spoiled the common minds and political-religious scenario.

7.3.2 Caroline Period

Charles I succeeded James I in 1625. He too was like his father wants to divine rights and wants to reduce the parliament. The issue of money, led to a bitter quarrel between king and parliament. James and Charles both tried to raise money by taxes without leave of parliament. But Charles forced to accept the "petition of right", a document which declared that taxes not sanctioned by parliament were illegal. In 1629, he dissolved the parliament and ruled without it for 11 years, this period

1629 to 1640 is known as “The Eleven Years’ Tyranny”, which marked by ruthless suppression of parliament leader and other opponents of government like the star chamber and the ecclesiastical court of high commission. To recover the money he adopted several illegal takes like ‘ship money’ in 1634. A puritan squire, John Hampden refused to pay the taxes.

The religious situation was harsh by the time of the appointment of Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud’s High Church or pro-catholic policy was the real cause of civil war. He enforces the ritual in church and banned the puritan or non-conformist worship outside them. For this, the puritans migrated to America and Laud imposed Anglican worship on the Scottish church. Charles was forced to call parliament in order to raise money for team to defend England. With the help of Laud, he attempted to establish an absolute system of control. But it was too late for that. The lines were already drawn between the Cavaliers and the Roundheads. In 1639 Charles found himself involved in a Civil War. In 1640, on the advice of his chief minister Stratford forced to call parliament lasted only three weeks called the Short Parliament. And in same year again he called the parliament, was continued for twenty year (1640-1660) called Long Parliament. Under the leadership of Pym, Hampden, and Cromwell the long parliament annulled the illegal acts of the king, impeached and executed Laud and the Earl of Stafford, and abolished the much hated Star Chamber and the Court of High Commission. In 1642, Civil War begins; important War was the battles of Marston Moor (1644), Naseby (1645), and Preston (1648). Parliament secured the help of Scotland by signing the “Covenant” to establish Presbyterianism in England. The king was supported in civil war by his nephew Prince Rupert and the Highland royalist Montrose, but they were defeated by Oliver Cromwell, parliamentary leader.

7.3.3 Commonwealth Period

Oliver Cromwell has started his independent party. The Congregationalists, (the puritan sect) believed in freedom of church and allows all sects to worship as they pleased. Neither parliament nor the people in general wanted the King’s inspection or dominance. Cromwell therefore rid of the parliament of its moderate Presbyterians and forced the shorten parliament or ‘Rump’ to be called the King’s trial. Charles condemned and his head cut off on 30 January 1649. And Cromwell dissolved the Rump by force in 1653. And he called several parliaments but he did not get on with any of them. He resigns from the government and become the military dictator till his death in 1658. And the General Monk the powerful leader of the Army, called a free parliament. In the 1660, Charles II came into throne as king.

❖ Religious history of puritan age

Religiously the age was an ideal, the ideal of a national church. It is intestinally interesting to note that Charles called Irish rebels and Scotch Highland to his aid by promising to restore their national religions; and

the English puritans, turning to Scotland for help, entered into the solemn Covenant of 1643, establishing a national Presbyterianism, whose aims and they have explored the beliefs and ideologies of John Wycliffe and John Calvin.

1. The Bible represented the true law of God. So they always wish to reshapes the people on the ideologies of Bible.
2. They were against the rule of Bishop. Instead they wanted church to be managed by a group of ‘presbyters’.
3. They believed the voice of god in each man’s conscience and so no priest or bishop could rightly come.
4. They insisted on extreme austerity of worship, believing that images, ornaments, alter, rituals, embroidered surplices owned by the priests.
5. The Puritans were strict disciplinarians who stressed on devotions, prayers, and introspections.
6. They hated to see the Church being reduced to political body. They challenged Elizabethan religious settlement of 1559 to solve the religious debate. They didn’t accept the Tudor doctrine that every member of the state was automatically the member of state Church.

Anglican had restricted to puritans and non- conformists to worship their own. And Cromwell allowed them to worship as they pleased.

7.4 PURITAN AGE (TIMELINE)

Political	
1603	James I overruled Queen Elizabeth
1618	James I advocates Sunday recreation in opposition to Puritan sabbatarianism
1625-27	Charles I crowned king of England, Scotland and Ireland
1628	Oliver Cromwell became member
1640	Oliver Cromwell leads the “New Model Army” rebels and became lord protector, puritan morality became the law
1645	William Laud is beheaded by Puritans
1649	Cromwell and his government behead king Charles I
1658	Cromwell died and succeeded as a Lord Protector by his son Richard
1660	Charles II is restored to the Throne
Religious	
1611	King James’ Bible first published and used throughout the English speaking world
1637	Scottish prayer book published
Historical	
1608	Birth of john Milton
1616	Birth of Richard Baxter and John Owen; Death of William Shakespeare
1618	Thirty years war begin in central Europe
1642	English civil war break out
1648	The end of the thirty years war

Social	
1620	‘The pilgrims’ Puritans separatists who had fled to the Netherlands sail to America and found colony at Plymouth Massachusetts
Literary	
1604	James I rejected most puritan requests for reform included their “Millenary petition”
1613	First single language English dictionary published
1642	Closing of Theatres
1650	Marvell’s ode upon Cromwell’s return from Ireland

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION IN BRIEF

1) What was the Gunpowder Plot?

2) What was the importance of Charles I’s marriage with Hennes Maria and why people feared with it?

3) Why king had called the parliament in 1640? And what is short Parliament and Long Parliament?

4) Which were the important battles in the Civil War?

5) Significance of Petition of Right.

6) What was the “Eleven Year’s Tyranny?”

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

STATE WHETHER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE

1. Oliver Cromwell became the Lord Protector of England.
2. The theatres were closed in the year 1660
3. In the year 1629 Charles I dissolved the parliament.
4. Metaphysical poetry deals with conceits and metaphors.
5. Andrew Marvell is called the founder of metaphysical poetry.

7.5 LET US SUM UP

The puritan age marked as religious renaissance and ups and downs in the socio-politics in the history of English literature. The puritan age highlights the trauma in the history. It explored the poetry and other forms of literature. Earlier drama was in the trend; but here we can see the decline of drama and theatres were closed in 1642.

7.6 KEY WORDS

- **Congregationalists:** Congregational churches are Protestant churches in the Reformed tradition practicing Congregationalist church governance, in which each congregation independently and autonomously runs its own affairs.
- **Jacobean:** It is applied to writing of the period of James I of England.
- **Cavalier Poets:** A group of poets during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649) –Richard Lovelace, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, Edmund Waller and Robert Herrick. The title Cavaliers derived from the Italian for horseman or knight. Spenserian
- **The Metaphysical Poets:** A group of poets of seventeenth century – Donne, Marvell, Vaughan, Herbert, Crashaw, Traherne. They used metaphors and conceits in their poetry at large.
- **Cavalier Poets:** A group of poets during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649) –Richard Lovelace, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, Edmund Waller and Robert Herrick. The title Cavaliers derived from the Italian for horseman or knight.
- **Commonwealth:** The period from the execution of Charles I to the inauguration of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell’s rule till 1653. Proliferation of printed polemic, proto-newspapers and the suppression of dramatic activities are the chief features of this age.

7.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. History of English literature by Elbert Alert
2. English Literature by W. J. Long
3. A Compendious History of English Literature by R. D. Trivedi
4. A Critical History of English Literature Vol. I & II by David Daiches

ANSWER KEY

(1-True, 2-False, 3-True, 4-True, 5-False)