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9.0 OBJECTIVES

- Historical overview of the Neo-Classical Age,
- Socio-political happenings and its impact..
- Literary features of the age, prose, poetry and drama of the period.
- The major writers and their works. .

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The word 'Neo-Classical' is a combination of two words 'Neo' and 'Classical'. Neo means 'new' and classical denotes the 'Roman and Greek classics'. This era is also known as the era of enlightenment. Popular types of literature include parody, letters, essays, and satire. People were interested in appearance, not in being genuine. Good manners and doing the right thing for the people was considered essential. This age is divided into three parts:

- Restoration Period
- Augustan Literature
- Age of Sensibility

9.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RESTORATION AGE

The period from 1660 to 1700 is known as the Restoration period or the Age of Dryden. Dryden was the representative writer of this period. People had seen a complete shut down of all media of entertainment and their social life took a big blow during Cromwell's rule. The restoration of King Charles II in 1660 marks the beginning of a new era both in the life and the literature of England. The King was received with wild joy on his return from exile. The change of government from Commonwealth to Kingship corresponded to a change in the mood of the nation.

The historical events like the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the religious controversy and the revolution of 1688 deeply influenced the social life and the literary movements of the age.

9.2.1. The Restoration

The Restoration of Charles II brought about a revolutionary change in lifestyle and literature. Since he was heavily influenced by the French culture, it reflected on his mannerisms and his ruling. During this period gravity, moral earnestness and decorum in all things, which distinguished the Puritan period, were rejected. The natural instincts which were suppressed during the previous era came in full view..

The beginning of Restoration started the process of social transformation. The atmosphere of gaiety and cheerfulness, of licentiousness and moral laxity was restored. The theatres were reopened. There was a stern reaction against the morality of the Puritans. Morality was on the wane. There was laxity everywhere in life. All these tendencies of the age are clearly reflected in the literature of the period.

9.3 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF RESTORATION AGE

9.3.1 Rise of Neo-classicism

The Restoration marks a complete break with the past. The people believed in the present, the real and the material. The writers, both in prose and poetry, agreed upon the rules and principles in accordance with which they should write. Rules and literary conventions became more important than the depth and seriousness of the subject matter to the writers of this period. They express superficial manners and customs of the aristocratic and urban society and did not pry into the mysteries of human mind and heart.

9.3.2 Imitation of the Ancient Masters

The authors of the period didn't have any exceptional literary talents. So they turned to the ancient writers, in particular, to the Latin writers, for

guidance and inspiration. Thus grew the neo-classical school of poetry. The neo-classicists or pseudoclassicists directed their attention to the slavish imitation of rules and ignored the importance of the subject matter. This habit was noticeable in the age of Dryden. It strengthened in the successive age of Pope.

9.3.3 Imitation of the French Masters

Famous French writers like Corneille, Racine, Moliere and Boileau were imitated. English writers imitated the French blindly; rather they copied the worst vices of the French. The French influence is seen in the coarseness and indecency of the Restoration comedy of manners. The influence of French and classical models of tragedy is seen in the heroic tragedy. The French influence is responsible for the growth and popularity of opera.

9.3.4. Correctness and Appropriateness

The new tendency, which reached its climax in the Age of Pope, is very clearly marked in the literature of the Restoration period. To Dryden Dr. Johnson applied the term Augustan, saying that 'Dryden did to English literature what Augustus did to home', which he found 'of brick and left of marble'. Dryden was the first representative of the new ideas that were to dominate English literature.

9.3.5. Realism and formalism

Restoration literature is realistic. It was very much concerned with life in London.. The early Restoration writers, observes W. J. Long, 'sought to paint realistic pictures of corrupt court and society, and emphasized vices rather than virtues and gave us coarse, low plays without interest or moral significance'.

9.4 POETRY OF RESTORATION AGE

The poetry of the Restoration period is formal, intellectual and realistic. S. A. Brooke writes: "The artificial style succeeded to any extinguished the natural, or to put it otherwise, a more intellectual poetry finally overcame poetry in which emotion always accompanied thought."

John Dryden (1631-1700): Dryden was the first of the new, as Milton was the last of the former school of poetry. He was a versatile poet. *Absalom and Achitophel* is a fine, finished satire on contemporary political situation. *Medal* is an attack on Shaftesbury. *Mac Flecknoe* is an attack on a former friend, Thomas Shadwell.

Religio Laici and *The Hind and the Panther* are two doctrinal poems. Dryden appears as a great story teller in verse in *The Fables*. As a lyric poet his fame rests on song for *St. Cecilia's Day* and *On Alexander's Feast*.

Samuel Butler (1612-1680): Butler's *Hudibras* is a satire on Puritans. It has genuine flashes of comic insight. It is a great piece of satirical poetry

and it stands next to Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. Butler is a remarkable figure in the poetic development of the Restoration period.

9.5 DRAMA OF THE AGE

The theatres which were closed in 1642 were opened during the Restoration. They usually hosted the upper class. Consequently, the plays written for the play houses were distinctly calculated by the authors to appeal to a general audience. This explains the rise of the heroic tragedy and the development of the comedy of manners. The heroic tragedy appealed to artificial, aristocratic sentiments on the subject of honour. Restoration comedy of manners reflected the morally vicious but intellectually brilliant atmosphere of the saloons and the chocolate houses.

9.5.1. Restoration Comedy of Manners

The Restoration comedy is also known as Comedy of Manners. These comedies expressed a reaction against Puritanism and the sexual repression it had attempted to enforce. Fashionable intrigues, sex, marriage and adultery were treated with worldly wit and a sense of the comedy of life. The characters in the plays represented the courtiers, the wits, and the men about town as well as to ladies of fashion, citizens, wives and country girls from real life.

These Comedies are considered anti-social because they represent social institutions, particularly marriage in a ridiculous light. They are neither romantic nor revolutionary. Conventions are accepted to be played with and attacked..

The Restoration dramatists were interested in wit and portrayal of manners rather than in the movement and progression of events. So they employed a spatial plot. The loose-knit pattern of such a plot was a definite advantage to them. It provided a better scope for the contrast and balance of characters. Conflict and intrigues occupy an important place in the Restoration Comedy. These comedies abound in wit and repartee.

9.5.2.1. Writers of Comedy of Manners

(i) **William Congreve** (1670-1729): Congreve is the best and finest writer of the comedy of manners. His famous comedies are *The Old Bachelor*, *The Double Dealer*, *Love For Love* and *The Way of the World*. *The Way of the World* is considered by common consent as a work of art and as pure comedy of manners by dint of its many artistic excellences, such as wit and brilliant, sparkling, dialogues. The story scarcely matters. Rickett remarks: "But such scenes as those where reputations are murdered by gossip, such characters as Mrs. Millamant and Mirabell, such flashes of wit in the talk between Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Millamant are to the fore reveal the Restoration drama at its height."

(ii) **George Etherege** (1635-91): Etherege's three plays are *The Comical Revenge*, *She Wou'd If She Cou'd*, *The Man of the Mode or Sir Foppling*

Flutter. In these plays he painted a true picture of the graceful but licentious upper classes. The prose dialogue is brilliant and natural.

(iii) **Sir John Vanbrugh** (1664-1726): His best comedies are *The Relapse*, *The Provok'd Wife*, and *Confederacy*. The first two plays employ the familiar devices of the Restoration Comedy. The *Confederacy* breaks new ground. The dramatist deals with the middle classes in this play.

(iv) **George Farquhar** (1678-1707): His famous comedies are *Love and a Bottle*, *The Constant Couple*, *Sir Harry Wildhair*, *The Inconstant*, *The Way to Win Him*, *The Recruiting Officer*, and *The Beaux's Stratagem*.

9.5.2.2. Decline of Comedy of Manners

From 1700 a change began to be evident in stage production. The immoral and antisocial influence of these plays was clearly perceived and the voice of protest was also heard. It was felt that a more human note was needed. With the rise of the middle class, moral standards changed.

9.6 AUGUSTAN LITERATURE

This age may be divided into two periods: the first stretching from 1700 to 1750 in the neo-classic Age, and the second, the transitional period which spans from 1750 to 1798. Classical tendencies lost their hold during the second period and there was a transition from classicism to romanticism. The period of transition is also known as the Age of Gray and Collins.

9.7 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE

The political and social changes exhibiting the supremacy of good sense, rationality, sanity and balance left a lasting mark on the literature of the Age of Pope and Dr. Johnson. The literature of the period bore the hallmark of intelligence, of wit and of fancy, not a literature of emotion, passion, or creative energy.

The main literary characteristics of the age are given below

9.7.1 Age of Prose and Reason

The poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century as represented by the works of Pope and Dr. Johnson is polished and witty but lacks fire, fine feeling, enthusiasm and imaginative appeal. In short, it interests us as a study of life but fails to delight or inspire us. Matthew Arnold calls it the eighteenth century "an age of prose". The poetry of this period, according to Hudson, "lacked inevitably the depth and grasp of essential things which alone assure permanence in literature, and the quest for refinement in style resulted too often in stilted affectations and frigid conventionalism."

9.7.2 Age of Satire

The dominance of satire is an important literary characteristic of the age. Most writers of the first half of the eighteenth century were used and rewarded by Whigs or Tories for satirising their enemies and for advancing their special political interests. W. J. Long writes: “Now satire --that is a literary work which searches out the faults of men or institutions in order to hold them up to ridicule—is at best a destructive type of criticism.”

9.7.3 Age of Neo-Classicism

We should clearly understand the meaning of the word —classic. The term —classic refers to writers of highest rank in any nation. In English literature, any writer who followed the simple, noble and inspiring method of these writers was said to have a classic style. A period marked by a number of celebrated writers who produce literature of a very high order, is also called the classic period of a nation’s literature.

9.7.4. Age of Good Sense:

Good sense is one of the central characteristics of the literature of this period. In the words of W. H. Hudson: “Good sense became the ideal of the time, and good sense meant a love of the reasonable and the useful and a hatred of the mystical, the extravagant and the visionary.”

9.7.5. Following Nature:

An important characteristic of the age was the belief that literature must follow nature. Pope wrote in *The Essay on Criticism*: “The rules of old discover’d, not devis’d,/ Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz’d;/ Nature like Liberty is but restrained/ By the same laws which first herself ordain’d/ .../ Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem/ To follow Nature is to follow them.”

9.7.6. Town and City Life as a Theme of Literature:

Another feature of the literature of the age is that it has a limited theme. Pope, Johnson, Addison, Steele etc., though urban in outlook and temperament, show remarkable interest in the middle classes and, thus, broaden the scope of literature. The theme of literature before them was strictly confined to fashionable and aristocratic circles. In the works of middle class writers classicism shows itself slightly coloured by a moralising and secretly sentimental intension.

9.7.7. The Heroic Couplet and the Poetic Diction as Tools of Writers:

The use of heroic couplet was predominant during this period. The heroic couplet was recognised as the only medium for poetic expression. In it the poets put all the skill and wrote with an unimaginable correctness and precision. The common words or ordinary language were deliberately kept out from poetic literature. The result was that literature of the Augustan Age became artificial, rational and intellectual.

9.8 LITERARY GENRES

9.8.1 The Augustan Poetry

The poetic style is polished, refined and artificial. It led to the establishment of a highly artificial and conventional style which became stereotyped into a traditional poetic diction. During this period the satiric and narrative forms of poetry flourished. Heroic couplet dominated in this poetry. Let us see the eminent writers of the period.

9.8.1.1 Alexander Pope

Pope is the representative poet of the Augustan Age. His famous works include *Pastorals*, *An Essay in Criticism*, *Windsor Forest*, *The Rape of the Lock*, translations of *Iliad and Odyssey*, *Elegy to the memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and *An Essay on Man*.

9.8.1.2 Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84)

Dr. Johnson, a voluminous writer, was a man of versatile literary genius. Smollett called him “the great champ of literature.”

Johnson’s two poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* are written in the heroic couplet and abound in personifications and other devices that belonged to the poetic diction of the age of neo-classicism.

Other Poets

Other poets who deserve mention are Matthew Prior, John Gray, Edward Young and Lady Winchilsea.

9.8.2 Prose of the Augustan Age

The prose of Bacon, S.T.Browne, Burton and Milton is prose of an age of poetry; but the prose of the new age is far better adapted to an age richer in philosophic and political speculation than to poetry. Dryden is the pioneer of modern prose.

The Periodical Essay was a peculiar product of the eighteenth century. It was called periodical because it was not published in book form like other types of essays, but it was published in magazines and journals which appeared periodically. It had an inherent social purpose. It aimed at improving the manners and morals of the people. Therefore, it is also termed as the —social essay. Defoe, Steele, Addison, Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith enriched the periodical essay during the eighteenth century.

9.8.3 Novel of the Augustan Age

The development of English prose contributed to the rise of novel during the eighteenth century.

9.8.3.1 The Four Wheels of the Novel.

Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne are known as the —four wheels of the novel. They brought this new genre to such maturity that it

became the glory of England. Let us take a look at these authors and their works as follows:

(i) **Samuel Richardson** (1689-1761). Richardson's first novel *Pamela* is the story of the trials, tribulations, and the final happy marriage of the heroine. It is written in the forms of letters. It is also known as an epistolary novel because the novel is developed with the exchange of letters between the characters. The moral and social purposes are successfully blended in it. It is considered as the first novel in the modern sense.

(i) **Henry Fielding** (1707-54): Fielding was the greatest of this new group of novelists. He is called "the father of English novel" because he, for the first time, propounded the technique of writing a novel. As a magistrate, he had an intimate knowledge of many types of human criminality which was of much use to him in his novels. His first novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) began as a burlesque of the false sentimentality and conventional virtues of Richardson's *Pamela*. Fielding humorously narrates the adventures of the hero, Joseph Andrews, and his companion, Parson Adams in it.

(ii) **Tobias Smollett** (1721-71): Smollett, who wrote *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, *The Adventures of Eregrine Pickle*, and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, added new feathers to the cap of the craft called English novel.

(iv) **Laurence Sterne** (1713-1768): Sterne's first novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* won him immediate recognition. It records 81 the experiences of the eccentric Shandy family. Its chief strength lies in its brilliant style,...and in its odd characters like Uncle Toby and Corporal Trimm. His second novel *A Sentimental Journey* combines fiction, sketches of travel, miscellaneous subjects and essays. It is remarkable for its brilliant style.

9.9.4 The Pre-Raphaelite Poetry

The Pre-Raphaelite movement, which was initiated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the mid-nineteenth century, was originally not a literary but an artistic movement. Rossetti, himself a painter (and a poet as well), felt that contemporary paintings had become too formal, academic, and unrealistic.

9.9.4.1 Literary Repercussions

Rossetti and some other members of the Brotherhood were both painters and poets. Consequently, Pre-Raphaelitism, not remaining confined to painting, made itself felt in English poetry. The qualities which distinguished Pre-Raphaelite painting also characterised Pre-Raphaelite poetry. To justify their ideas, the Brotherhood started a periodical publication, *The Germ*, which did not, however, extend beyond four numbers. As an organised group the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood ceased

to exist beyond the early 1850's, but was revitalised by Rossetti's meeting with William Morris in 1856.

Features

Let us now consider the salient features of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

(1) **Break with Tradition:**

Pre-Raphaelite poetry broke with the tradition set by poets like Tennyson. They revolted against the over-concern of poets with contemporary and socio-political problems. Consequently, none of the Pre-Raphaelites concern themselves with realism and the mundane issues of his day.

(2) **Medievalism**

Medieval Italy, being the land of artists before Raphael, held for them a very special attraction. The medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites had a subtle something which differentiates it from that of the Romantics before them.

(3) **Sensuousness**

Like Rossetti most Pre-Raphaelites were painters as well as poets. Referring to *Rossetti*, Compton-Rickett observes: "That the pictorial element is more insistent in Rossetti than in Keats is obviously due to the fact that Rossetti's outlook on the world is essentially that of the painter." But this thinking and feeling in pigments sometimes leads the Pre-Raphaelites to excess, giving rise to two defects:

(4) **Fleshly School of Poetry:**

The Pre-Raphaelites made no excuses about their use of sensory elements. Swinburne and others strongly reacted to the charge of Buchanan that the poetry of their school was "fleshly." Such poem? as Rossetti's *Troy Town* and *The House of Life* are somewhat "fleshly," but Rossetti is not an indecent sensualist.

(5) **Metre and Music:**

Pre-Raphaelite poetry is rich not only in pictorial quality but also in music. The trouble is that the Pre-Raphaelites go to excess in both. Legouis observes: "Vowels call to vowels and consonants to consonants, and these links often seem stronger than the links of thought or imagery." According to Compton-Rickett, Swinburne's effects are harmonic rather than melodic.

9.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the social and historical aspects of Restoration period like concept of restoration, religious and political conflicts. The unit deals with the facets of restoration age like rise of neoclassicism, imitations of the ancient masters and their impact on the writings of the Restoration age.. It also speaks of the prose and verse of the age. The emphasis is placed on the dramatic activities of restoration age especially the birth of new tragedy called Heroic tragedy and comedy called Comedy of Manners. The important dramatists and their works are introduced which is followed by the discussion on the decline and decay of drama during Restoration Age.

9.11 KEYWORDS

Neo:

new

Pre-Raphaelite: a group of painters of the 19th century.

Augustan: inspired by Augustan writers Homer and Virgil

Repercussion: unintended unpleasant consequence of an event

9.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. A Tale of a Tub is a

- (a) political Satire (b) religious treaties (c) religious allegory

2. Which of the following epithets does not apply to the Rape of the lock?

- (a) Mock-Heroic (b) Heroi-Comical (c) Comic epic in Prose

3. In what year did the restoration period begin?

- (a) 1660 (b) 1700 (c) 1694

4. The pre-raphelite brotherhood was led by _____.

- (a) Rossetti (b) Shelly (c) Pope

5. _____ is the father of the English essay.

- (a) Coleridge (b) Swinburne (c) Bacon

6. Prince Charles brought a lot of _____ influence in England.

- (a) Spanish (b) French (c) German

7. The comedy of _____ grew in the restoration age.

- (a) Manners (b) style (c) fashion

8. Neo-classicism imitated numerous _____ authors.

- (a) ne (b) old (c) contemporary

9. _____ excelled at heroic tragedy.

- (a) Pope (b) Dryden (c) Byron

10. Sheridan was known for writing _____ comedy.

- (a) emotional (b) mysterious (c) sentimental

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions

1. Write a note on the historical and social background of the Restoration period.

2. What are the literary characteristics of the Restoration period? Discuss.

3. What is Heroic tragedy? Write a note on the Heroic Tragedy.

4. Discuss the characteristics of Restoration comedy of manners.

5. Write short notes on the followings:

- I. Writers of Comedy of Manners
- II. Restoration poetry with reference to Dryden
- III. Decline of Comedy of Manners
- IV. Restoration prose.

Augustan Age

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 The eighteenth century is an age of prose, reason and good sense. Discuss.
- 2 Give an account of eighteenth century society.
- 3 Discuss briefly the main characteristics of the transitional period during the eighteenth century. Why is it called the transitional period?
- 4 Discuss the contribution of the —four wheels of novell to the development of English novel.
- 5 Write an essay on the transitional poets of the eighteenth century.
- 6 Discuss the contribution of Goldsmith and Sheridan to English comedy.
- 7 Give an account for the rise of novel in the eighteenth century.

9.13 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Formation of English Neo-classical Thought* by James William Johnson.
1. *The Baroque in English Neo-classical Literature* by John Douglas Canefield.
 2. *A Critical History of English Literature* by David Daiches.
 3. *Ideas of Restoration in English Literature* by Nicholas Jose.

4. *The Pelican Guide to English Literature* by Boris Ford.

Answers

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10
C	C	A	A	C	B	A	B	B	C