

UNIT-9**RESTORATION AGE-1 HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS****STRUCTURE****9.0 Objectives****9.1 Introduction****9.2 Historical Background of The Restoration age****9.3 Literary Characteristics of Restoration age****9.3.1 Rise of Neo-classicism****9.3.2 Imitation of the Ancient Masters****9.3.3 Imitation of the French Masters****9.3.4 Correctness and Appropriateness****9.3.5 Realism and formalism****9.4 Poetry of Restoration age****9.5 Prose of Restoration age****9.6 Restoration Drama****9.6.1 The Restoration Heroic Tragedy****9.6.2 Restoration Comedy of Manners****9.7 Let us sum up****9.8 Key Words****9.9 Suggested Reading****Answers**

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit you shall learn

- To discuss the historical background of the restoration period
- To discuss the major literary characteristics of the restoration period
- To discuss the development of poetry, prose and drama in the restoration period
- To discuss the development of heroic tragedy and comedy of manners in the period

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The Restoration brought many changes to the Great Britain. After the prolonged civil and religious conflict of the seventeenth century, Britain attained political stability. The countryside kept its seemingly timeless agricultural rhythms, even as the nation's great families consolidated their control over the land and those who worked it. Change came most dramatically to cities. The cities absorbed much of a national population that almost doubled in the period, to ten million. The public but nongovernmental institutions and practices became powerful in the period. The theaters, coffee houses, concert halls, pleasure gardens, lending libraries, picture exhibitions, and shopping districts made their footprints in London. Reflecting and stimulating this activity, an expanding variety of printed works vied to interest literate women and men, whose numbers grew to include most of the middle classes and many among the poor. Civil society also linked people to an increasingly global economy, as they shopped for diverse goods from around the world. The rich and even the moderately well off could profit or go broke from investments in joint-stock companies, which controlled much of Britain's international trade, including its lucrative traffic in slaves.

At home, new systems of canals and turnpikes stimulated domestic trade, industry, and travel, bringing distant parts of the country closer together. The cohesion of the nation also depended on ideas of social order—some old and clear, many subtle and new. An ethos of politeness came to prevail, a standard of social behavior to which more and more could aspire yet that served to distinguish the privileged sharply from the rude and vulgar. This and other ideas, of order and hierarchy, of liberty and rights, of sentiment and sympathy, helped determine the ways in which an expanding diversity of people could seek to participate in Britain's thriving cultural life.

9.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESTORATION PERIOD

The Restoration of 1660, the return of Charles Stuart and the monarchy to England, brought hope to a divided nation. Almost all of Charles's subjects welcomed him home. After the abdication of Richard Cromwell in 1659, the country had appeared at the point of chaos, and Britain was eager to believe that their king would bring order and law and a spirit of mildness back into the national life. But no political settlement could be stable until the religious issues had been resolved. The restoration of the monarchy meant that the established church would also be restored, and though Charles was willing to pardon or ignore many former enemies, the bishops and Anglican clergy were less tolerant of dissent.

When Parliament reimposed the Book of Common Prayer in 1662 and then in 1664 banned Nonconformists from religious meetings outside the established church, thousands of clergymen resigned their livings, and the prisons were filled with preachers like John Bunyan who refused to be silenced. In 1673, the Test Act required all holders of civil and military

offices to take the sacrament in an Anglican church and to deny belief in transubstantiation. Thus, Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics were largely excluded from public life. Alexander Pope, a Catholic, could not attend a university, own land or vote. The scorn of Anglicans for Nonconformist zeal or "enthusiasm" bursts out in Samuel Butler's popular *Hudibras* (1663), a caricature of Presbyterians and Independents. And English Catholics were widely regarded as potential traitors and thought to have set the Great Fire that destroyed much of London in 1666.

Yet the victory of the established church did not resolve the constitutional issues that had divided Charles I and Parliament. Charles II had promised to govern through Parliament but secretly tried to merge royal power. He tried to hide his Catholic sympathies and avoided a test of strength with Parliament. In 1678 the report of the Popish Plot, in which Catholics would rise and murder their Protestant foes, terrified London. No doubt, the charge turned out to be a fraud still the House of Commons exploited the fear by trying to force Charles to exclude his Catholic brother, James, duke of York, from succession to the throne.

The disorder of this period is captured brilliantly by Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). Finally, Charles defeated the Exclusion Bill by dissolving Parliament. But the crisis resulted in a basic division of the country between two new political parties: the Tories, who supported the king, and the Whigs, the king's opponents. Neither party could live with James II. After he came to the throne in 1685, he claimed the right to make his own laws, suspended the Test Act, and began to fill the army and government with fellow Catholics. The birth of James's son in 1688 brought matters into focus. Secret negotiations paved the way for the Dutchman William of Orange, a champion of Protestantism and the husband of James's Protestant daughter Mary. William landed with a small army in southwestern England and marched toward London. As he advanced the king's allies melted away, and James fled to a permanent exile in France. But the house of Stuart would be heard from again. For more than half a century, some loyal Jacobites, especially in Scotland, supported James, his son, and his grandson as the legitimate rulers of Britain. Moreover, a good many writers, from Aphra Behn and Dryden to Robert Burns, privately sympathized with Jacobitism. But after the failure of one last rising in 1745, the cause would dwindle gradually into a wistful sentiment. In retrospect, the coming of William and Mary in 1688—the Glorious, or Bloodless, Revolution—came to be seen as the beginning of a stabilized, unified Great Britain.

In 1689, a Bill of Rights revoked James's actions and it limited the powers of the Crown, reaffirmed the supremacy of Parliament, and guaranteed some individual rights. The same year the Toleration Act relaxed the strain of religious conflict by granting a limited freedom of worship to Dissenters so long as they swore allegiance to the Crown. This proved to be a workable compromise; and with the passage of the Act of Settlement in 1701, the difficult problems that had so long divided England seemed resolved. The principles established in 1689 endured unaltered in essentials until the Reform Bill of 1832.

9.3 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF RESTORATION AGE

Restoration literature indicated the complete breaking of ties with the Renaissance literature. It reflected the spirit of the age. The spirit of corruption and moral laxity, which were predominant in the social life of the restoration, are reflected in literature. The following are the major characteristics of the period:

9.3.1 Rise of Neo-classicism

The Restoration marks an entire break with the past. The people believed in the present, the real and the material. Men learnt to fear individual enthusiasm, and therefore they tried to discourage it by setting up ideals of conduct in accordance with reason and common sense, to which all men should adapt themselves. Rules of etiquette and social conventions were established and the problem of life became that of self-expression within the narrow bounds, which were thus prescribed. All these tendencies were reflected in the literature of this period. 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 expressed superficial manners and customs of the aristocratic and urban society and did not interfere into the mysteries of human mind and heart.

9.3.2 Imitation of the Ancient Masters

The authors of the period turned to the ancient writers for guidance and inspiration. It was generally believed that the ancients had reached the height of excellence and the modern poets could do no better than model their writings on the classics. Thus grew the neo-classical school of poetry. The neo-classicists or pseudo-classicists could not climb to great imaginative heights or could not penetrate deeply into human emotions. They 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.

9.3.3 Imitation of the French Masters

King Charles II and his companions had spent the period of exile in France. They demanded that poetry and drama should follow the style to which they had become accustomed in France. Pepys wrote in his diary that he was bored to see Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600). The Italian influence had been dominant in Elizabethan period. Now began the period of French influence, which showed itself in English literature for the next century. The famous French writers like Corneille, Racine, Moliere and Boileau were imitated. English writers imitated the French blindly. The French influence is seen in the coarseness and indecency of the Restoration comedy of manners. The combined 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 works of the authors of the Restoration period was imitative. They abandoned freedom altogether and slavishly followed the rules. Edward Albert writes in *History of English literature* (1979): —Thus they evolved a number of —rules which can usefully be summarized in the injunction —Be Correct, correctness means avoidance of enthusiasm, moderate opinions moderately expressed, strict care and accuracy in poetic technique; and humble imitation of the style of Latin Classics.

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 Rome, which he found —of brick and left of marble. Dryden was the first representative of the new ideas that were to dominate English literature till the end of the eighteenth century.

9.3.5 Realism and formalism

Restoration literature is realistic. It was very much concerned with life in London, and with details of dress, fashions and manners. —The early Restoration writers, observes W. J. Long in *English literature its history and its significance for the life of the English-speaking world* (1909) —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. Like Hobbes, they saw only the externals of man, his body and appetites, not his soul and his ideals.... Later, however, this tendency to realism became more wholesome. While it neglected romantic poetry, in which youth is eternally interested, it led to a keener study of the practical motives, which govern human action. The Restoration writers avoided all extravagances of thought and language and aimed at achieving directness and simplicity of expression. Dryden accepted the excellent rule for his prose, and adopted the heroic couplet, as the next best thing for the greater part of this poetry. It is largely due to Dryden that —writers developed formalism of style, that precise, almost mathematical elegance, miscalled classicism, which ruled the English literature for the next century.

9.4 POETRY OF RESTORATION AGE

The poetry than the subject matter of the Restoration period is formal, intellectual and realistic. In it, form is more important. S. A. Brooke in *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1880* (1832) 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.

(i) **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* (1681) is a fine, finished satire on contemporary

political situation. *The Medal* (1682) is an attack on Shaftesbury. *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) is a biting attack on a former friend, Thomas Shadwell. *Religio Laici* (1682) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687) are two doctrinal poems. Dryden appears as a great storyteller in verse in *The Fables*. As a lyric poet, his fame rests on a song for St. Cecilia's Day (1687) and *On Alexander's Feast* (1697). Dryden is the representative poet of his age. He began the neo-classical age in literature. It was his influence and example, which lifted the classic couplet for many years as the accepted measure of serious English poetry.

(ii) Samuel Butler (1612-1680): Butler's *Hudibras* (1684) is a pointed satire on Puritans. It was influenced by the satires of Rabelais and Cervantes. 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* (1681). Butler is a remarkable figure in the poetic development of the Restoration period.

9.5 PROSE OF RESTORATION AGE

The Restoration marks the beginning of modern prose. William Henry Hudson in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* (1998) discusses Matthew Arnold's remarks: —the Restoration marks the birth of our modern English prose. It is by its organism – an organism opposed to length and involvement, and enabling us to be clear, plain and short – that English prose after the Restoration breaks with the styles of the times preceding it, finds the true law of prose and becomes modern, becomes, in spite of superficial differences, the style of our own day. The spread of the spirit of common sense and of the critical temper of mind; the love of definiteness and clarity; and of the hatred of the pedantic and obscure have contributed to the development of English prose. It was an age of intellectualism and rationalism, the qualities, which are essential for prose. The growing interest in rationalism and the advancement of science greatly aided the general movement towards precision and lucidity of expression, which are the essential qualities of good prose style. Various political parties and groups, and growing interest in day-to-day activities encouraged journalism, which needed simple, straightforward prose style. The Coffee houses and drawing rooms attracted the intellectuals and general public for discussions on various topics of general interest. Thus an easy and conversational style, which properly expressed the tastes and the intellectual make-up of the new reading public, evolved. Thus, various factors contributed to the evolution of modern prose during the Restoration period. John Dryden (1631-1700) was one of the greatest prose writers of this period. His prefaces and his famous *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* (1668) make him —the leader of that modern prose in which the style is easy, unaffected, moulded to the subject, and in which proper words are placed in their proper places. John Bunyan (1632-1704) wrote two prose allegories, *Grace Abounding* (1666), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680). Bunyan is called a pioneer of English novel. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is remarkable for impressive characters, presentation

of contemporary life and dramatic interest. Bunyan's style is simple, clear, lucid, Biblical and colloquial.

The diaries of the period are important in terms of style and new form. There are two diary writers who need to be introduced. The Diary of Sir John Pepys (1633-1703) is remarkable for the unaffected naturalness of style and narrative skill. As a historical document it provides an interesting view of the life of Restoration London. John Evelyn's Diary (1818) was written with an eye on the public. It is a more finished production in the manner of style. Other writers who deserve mention are Lord Halifax, Sir William Temple, Thomas Hobbes, and Sir John Locke.

9.6 RESTORATION DRAMA

The theatres, which were closed in 1642, were opened during the Restoration. They became the riotous haunt of the gentry class. Consequently, the plays written for the play houses were distinctly calculated by the authors to appeal to a courtly and cavalier audience. It is this that 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 honor. And the Restoration comedy of manners reflected the morally vicious but intellectually brilliant atmosphere of the saloons and the chocolate houses.

9.6.1 The Restoration Heroic Tragedy

The Restoration tragedy is also known as the Heroic Tragedy. The influence of French romance and drama produced its first important result in the form of the heroic play. Bonamy Dobree in *Restoration Tragedy* (1929) comments on the Restoration Tragedy: —As regards Restoration Tragedy the classical formal element was already there with Ben Johnson, the heroic aspects were adumbrated, often in Fletcher and Massinger, and even in Shakespeare. Coriolanus is a figure of heroic tragedy and so indeed in Tamburlaine. Viola is a heroic woman.... The Restoration Tragedy is artificial. Its emotions are unreal. According to Dobree the fantastic ideas of valour, the absurd notions of dauntless, unquenchable love of Restoration Tragedy —do not correspond with experience. It mainly deals with conflict between love and honour. John Dryden was the principal writer of the Heroic tragedy. His famous tragedies are *Tyrannick Love* (1670), *Conquest of Granada* (1672) and *All for Love or The World Well Lost* (1677). In Dryden's heroic plays we find a hero of superhuman powers and with superhuman ideals; there is a heroine of unsurpassed beauty and constancy; there is an inner conflict in the minds of several characters between love and honour; and there is a striving story of fighting and martial enthusiasm, filled with intense dramatic interest. *All For Love* is the finest tragedy of this period. It is a tragedy written in blank verse. It is also considered as imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623). The central theme of the play is the love between Antony and Cleopatra, the unlawful love. The tragedy focuses on the last hours of the lives of its hero and heroine. Antony, Cleopatra, Ventidius, Dollabella and Octavius are the major characters of the play.

Another playwright of the restoration period was Thomas Otway. He wrote *Alcibiades* (1675), *Don Carlos* (1676) , *The Orphan* (1680) and finally *Venice Preserved* (1682) which is considered to be the masterpiece of Thomas Otway. Otway's source for the play was a French novel *A conspiracy of the Spaniards against the state of Venice* (1675), by L'abbé de Saint-Réal. It is the best example of a Restoration verse tragedy with some genuinely comic moments.

9.6.2 Restoration Comedy of Manners

Comedy of manners is used as the synonyms of restoration comedy. It is also called sentimental comedy. The masterpieces of the genre are William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), *The School for Scandal* (1777).

A careful examination of the periods in which this comedy has emerged in England reveals the fact that high style and fashion identified the behavior of the society. The restoration era was the age of the beau and his imitator, the fop; dress and mannerism continued to be important. It is a style of dramatic comedy that reflects the life, ideals and manners of upper class society. The subject of comedy of manners is the way people behave, the manners they employ in a social context. The chief concerns of the characters are sex and money. It depicts the relations and intrigues of men and women belong to polished sections of society. Restoration comedy of manners was influenced by Ben Jonson's comedy of humors. Deriving inspiration from Jonson's comedies, the Comedy of manners takes a completely new coloration combining a humor and critical trait that the English theatre had never known before. According to Julia Stefanova, the comedy of Manners depicts a small world, which has a distinct territory of its own the fashionable parts of the London of Charles II's time. Its main activities take place in the public garden like Hyde Park, St. James's Park, Mulberry Garden, fashionable clubs, houses and drawing rooms of the aristocratic classes.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -1

Answers The Following Questions.

1. Why do you think that comedy and satire became so important during the Restoration period? What does this suggest about the perspective of the writers of this era?

2. Restoration literature is defined by a political event i.e the restoration of monarchy in England in 1660. What does the Restoration period teach us about the relationship between literature and politics?

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3. British writing of the Restoration era is often called "neoclassical". Why is this?

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4. Discuss the development of prose in the restoration period.

5. **Write short notes on:**

- (a) Heroic tragedy (b) Comedy of Manners

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -2

CHOOSE ONE OPTION FOR BELOW GIVEN QUESTIONS.

1. What happened in 1707 that would forever alter the relationship between England, Wales, and Scotland?
 - a) The trial and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots
 - b) The Toleration Act
 - c) The failed invasion of the Spanish Armada
 - d) The Act of Union
2. Historical events often influence literature. Which of the following did NOT occur during the Restoration period?
 - a) Charles II was restored to the throne
 - b) The French Revolution
 - c) The Great Fire of London
 - d) The Exclusion Bill Crisis
3. What was "restored" in 1660?
 - a) The monarchy, in the person of Charles II
 - b) The dominance of the Tory Party
 - c) The "Book of Common Prayer"
 - d) Toleration of religious dissidents
4. What literary work best captures a sense of the political turmoil, particularly regarding the issue of religion, just after the Restoration?
 - a) Gay's *Beggar's Opera*
 - b) Butler's *Hudibras*

- c) Pope's *Dunciad*
 - d) Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*
5. Who was deposed from the English throne in the Glorious, or Bloodless, Revolution in 1688?
 - a) Elizabeth I
 - b) James II
 - c) George II
 - d) William and Mary
 6. Who became the first "prime minister" of Great Britain in the reign of George II?
 - a) Henry St. John
 - b) Robert Harley
 - c) John Churchill
 - d) Robert Walpole
 7. What name is given to the English literary period that emulated the Rome of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid?
 - a) Augustan
 - b) Metaphysical
 - c) Romantic
 - d) Neo-Romantic
 8. In what year did the Restoration period begin?
 - a) 1694
 - b) 1770
 - c) 1660
 - d) 1760
 9. Samuel Pepys, a famous diarist from the Restoration period, had which of the following occupations?
 - a) Naval administrator
 - b) Lawyer
 - c) Speech writer
 - d) Merchant
 10. Who was king during the Restoration period?
 - a) James II
 - b) Edward VI
 - c) Charles I
 - d) Charlers II

9.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed the historical background of the restoration period that includes the restoration of Charles II as the king of England. It established the political stability. We also observed the religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant due to the Book of Common Prayer. Samuel Butler's popular *Hudibras* (1663) explains this conflict remarkably. Rise of neo classicism, imitation of ancient masters

and French culture are the major literary characteristics of this period. We witness the development of the restoration tragedy and comedy of manners in this period.

9.8 KEY WORDS

- **Restoration:**

The re-establishment of Charles II as King of England in 1660. After the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, his son Richard (1626–1712) proved incapable of maintaining the Protectorate, and General Monck organized the king's return from exile.

- **Test Act:**

The Test Acts were a series of English penal laws that served as a religious test for public office and imposed various civil disabilities on Roman Catholics and nonconformist.

- **The Great Fire of London:**

The Great Fire of London was a major conflagration that swept through the central parts of the English city of London from Sunday, 2nd September to Thursday, 6th September 1666.

9.9 SUGGESTED READING

1. Colley, L. In Defiance of Oligarchy: the Tory Party 1714-60 (Cambridge, 1982)
2. Dickinson, H.T. Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain (London, 1977)
3. Harris, T. Politics under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715 (London, 1993)
4. Henshall, N. The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy (London, 1992)
5. Holmes, G. British Politics in the Age of Anne (London, 1967)
6. Kenyon, J.P. Revolution Principles: the Politics of Party 1689-1720 (Cambridge, 1977) Kramnick, I. Bolingbroke and His Circle: the Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Ithaca and London, 1992)
7. Bonamy Dobree. English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1700-1740, (Oxford, 2011)
8. Bonamy Dobree.. Restoration Tragedy (Roman books, 2014)
9. William Henry Hudson. An Outline History of English Literature, (Atlantic, 2008)

**Answers: 1- D ,2 - B ,3- A ,4- D , 5- B , 6- D ,7- A ,8- C ,9 -A ,
10 - D**