

**THE HEYDAY OF DRAMA, PROSE, POETRY AND LITERARY TENDENCIES IN
THE ELIZABETHAN AGE**



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English Renaissance literature is marked by four periods, The period of preparation (1500-79) it was the youth of the Renaissance, The Elizabethan (1579-1602)-it was the manhood of Renaissance, The Jacobean period (1603-1625)-it was the middle age of the English Renaissance, The Caroline period (1620-1660)-it was the old age of the Renaissance. The efflorescence of the Renaissance spirit appeared in the Elizabethan literature which was marked by fullness of national life, a passion for knowledge, a spirit of daring adventure and an ambition to achieve great things .Gradually the spell of the Renaissance disappeared and people found their hopes dashed to the ground .The Renaissance raised man's to hope the most magnificent potentialities within him, only to dash them again in blackest pessimism as soon as he realized his individual limitation and then life became "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Shakespeare chimes the notes of disillusionment, the anarchy of the individual mind of man broken loose from the mornings of religious or social order. The many sided intellectual activities of the Renaissance were fully reflected in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the sixteenth century the prose writings of Bacon are the true specimen of the materialistic and Machiavellian fact of the Renaissance. It is in the Essays that the mind of Bacon is brought into immediate contact with the minds of ordinary readers. In

these Essays Bacon writes as a looker on at the game of human affair. They are specimens of that wisdom which arises out of a universal insight into the affairs of the world. The Essays are the fullest and finest expression of the practical wisdom he had acquired from study, experience and meditation. They constitute a hand –book of practical wisdom enclosing in them shortest maxims exhibiting and astonishing treasure of insight. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard. the Earl of Surrey, were the pioneers of the new poetry in England. These to diplomats brought with them new spirit of the Renaissance from Italy and breathed in Tootle’s Miscellany which is recognized as one of the landmarks of English literature. They gave English poetry a new sense of grace, dignity and the harmony which were lacking in the Scottish and English Chaucerian’s. They introduced the vogue of sonnet writing and blank verse poetry in England. The Renaissance spirit had its full play in the hands of Spenser. He has been Recognized has ‘the touchstone of English poetic sensibility’. In Spenser we have fine expression of Renaissance ideal of adventure and active life which is expressed In The Faerie Queene:

*“The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought
 And is with child of glorious great intent,
 Can never rest. until it forth have brought
 The eternal brood of glory excellent.”*

The drams of the University Wits bubble with the spirit of the Renaissance. John Lyly’s Euphues and Greene’s short novels, based on Italian stories, were popular among the leisured reading public of the day. Among the University Wits Marlowe has been called “the true child of the Renaissance”. In his four plays, Tamberlaine, Dr. Faustus, The Gew of Malta and Edward II, we notice a full-blooded expression of the entire age with all its new aspiration, hopes and dashing adventure. His plays are the epitome of what the Renaissance people felt and lived. The pleasures of the earth which the man of the Renaissance held dear are give full expression in Tambelaine.

*“A gold is not glorious as a King,
 I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven
 Cannot compare with kingly joys in earth,”*

The love of wealth expressed in The Jew of Malta ; love for power and pleasure ,a desire for infinite knowledge and glorification of Beauty are expressed in Dr. Faustus .The defiant tone of the Renaissance adventure is heard in the speeches of young Mortimer in Edward II :

*“What Mortimer, can raged stony walls,
 Immure thy virtue that aspires to heaven.”*

For the later Elizabethan dramatists ‘liberty meant unshackled licence. This was held in check by Ben Jonson for sometime but after him the stage became a playground for melodramatic horrors and appealed neither the court nor the public. The successors of Ben Jonson lacked not only broad and moral insight but wrote tragedies of blood and terror, and produced evil and licentious scene with the result that in 1642 both the houses of parliament voted to close theatres as breeders of immorality.

Table of Development of the Drama To 1566

Henry I, 1110-35	:-	First recorded dramatic performance in England, Ludus de S. Katherina, about,1110
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Henry III, 1216-72	:-	Institution of the festival of Corpus Christi , by which a great impulse was given to the performance of miracle plays,1204
Edward III, 1327-77	:-	York cycle, about 1340 Chester cycle middle of 14 th century
Henry VI, 1422-71	:-	Wakefield cycle, middle of 15 th century.
Richard III, 1483-85	:-	Coventry cycle, 15 th century
Henry VII, 1485-1509	:-	Earliest extent morality play, The Castell of Perseverance, middle of 15 th century.
Henry VIII, 1509-47	:-	Interludes, early 16 th century The Four P's, about 1520
Edward VI, 1547-53	:-	Roister Doister, about 1550, Many translation of Seneca's tragedies, second half of 16 th century.
Elizabeth, 1558-1603	:-	Gorboduc.1561, Gammer Gurton's Neetle (by John Still, Second English comedy),1566,

The salient characteristics the of Age of Shakespeare or the Elizabethan Age:-

Under the influence of the Renaissance the Elizabethan people made efforts to free themselves from the rigid institution of the middle ages, feudalism and the churches and to assert their right to live, to think, and to express themselves in accordance with a more flexible secular code."Man started to think for themselves and to questions accepted beliefs. As men gained this freedom they felt less inclined to assent to the medieval view that this life should be sacrificed to the future; they turned more and more to the present world, to the problem of gaining mastery in it through wealth or statecraft, of discovering its secrets through exploration and scientific experiment of heightening its enjoyments through art and literature." During the Elizabethan age there was the revival of classical learning. The study of the classical authors became a passion with the people of this age. Instead of starving on arid productions of the inferior schoolmen or the watery effusions of the imitation of Lydgate, the intelligent young men of the day turned to Greek philosophy and poetry for nourishment.

The rediscovery and reinterpretation of antiquity gave birth to a new culture that of humanism. The humanists led by Erasmus began to take interest in life and in mankind. In England also the humanistic culture had its influence. Under the new creed life no longer seemed a mere penance to be endured by good Christians in preparation for heaven. People began to take interest in this life and strove hard to make it larger and happier. The reformation which began in the time of Henry VIII reached it culminates on during the Elizabethan age. Spenser presented the best trends of reformation in the Faerie Queene. The defect of the Spanish Armada brought about the revival of nationalistic and patriotic feelings among the people of this time. At the defeat of the Spanish Armada the national spirits rose to delirious height of self-confidence comparable to the exaltation of Greece after Salames. This upsurge of nationalistic feelings which had first began with Chaucer in the fourteenth century found its blossoming in the Elizabethan literature. Both in politics and religions the English nation was

attaining to a state of stability. The unions of the crowns finally set at rest the ancient quarrel between Scotland and England. In the religions there was the spirit of toleration which was largely due to the Queen's influence. The minds of the people freed from religious fears and persecution turned with great enthusiasm to creative activities. This settlement was all for the good of literature. It was an age of comparative social contentment in strong contrast with the days of England. The rapid increase of manufacturing towns gave employment to thousands of people who had before been idle and discontented. The sense of social security and contentment gave a spur to literary activity.

In material surrounding and comforts to there were great changes and improvement taking place. Commerce was making very considerable progress. Fresh means of wealth were being initially or fully developed. The dissolution of the monasteries had helped to produce an economic revolution which has not yet been sufficiently recognized. The contrast between the England of Henry VIII and that of his daughter in respect of trade, manufactures and agriculture is immense.

The new discoveries in the field of astronomy by Copernicus against the old theories of Ptolemy, and the discovery of America by Columbus and Cabot brought about a Widening of horizon."New knowledge began to pour in from the East new world were openings in the west. The great voyagers, whose exploits were chronicled in the immortal pages of Hakluyt brought home both material intellectual treasures from beyond the 'still vexed Bermoothes' as Shakespeare called them such exploration had important effect on the production of literature."

It was an age of adventure. The imagination of people was stirred. The new rich hands opened to the sight and imaginations created new forms to people the new lands. "so dreams and deeds increase side by side and the dream is ever greater than the deed. That is the meaning of Elizabethan literature."

Printing, which Caxton had introduced in the previous age, had now its full effect. The full learning was popularized by the printing press previously education had been in the hands of the church, but with the Renaissance began secular education. A reading public was formed during the Elizabethan age and the new literature was welcomed by the people.

Literary Tendencies of the age:-

The ardent revival in the study of Greek literature brought a dazzling light into many dark places of intellect. The new classical influences were a great benefit. They tempered and polished the earlier rudeness of English literature.

The Elizabethan age was rich in literary productions of all kinds. Singing is impossible when one's heart is undeclared and at any moment one may be laid prostrate. Not till the accessions of Queen Elizabethan did a better state of things begin to be. In the Elizabethan age pamphlets and treatise, were freely written. Sometimes writers indulged in scurrilous abuses which were of personal characters. On the whole, the output of literature was very wide, and after the lean years of the preceding epoch the prodigal issue of the Elizabethan age is almost embarrassing."The romantic quest is for the remote, the wonderful and the beautiful. All these desire were abundantly fed during the Elizabethan age, which is the first and the greatest romantic epoch." There was a daring and a resolute of was worthy of it."The Elizabethan age

witnessed translation of into English of several important foreign books. In this respect Legouis remarks, "The rich soil was fertilized by a deep layer of translations. By 1579, many of the great books of ancient and modern times had been translated into English, almost all of them by 1603, the end of Elizabethan's reign. Some of these translations formed current readings and some became as popular as the writings of English authors." Many translations were as popular as the original works. Sir Thomas North translated Plutarch's Lives and John Florio translated Montaigne's Essais. No less popular were the translations in verse e.g., Metamorphoses by Arthur Golding, Ariosto's Orlando furioso by Sir John Harrington, Tasso's Jerusalem Libanite by Richard Carew.

In spite of borrowings from abroad, the authors of this age showed a spirit of independence and creativeness. Shakespeare borrowed freely, but by the alchemy of his creative imaginations he transformed the dross into gold. Spenser introduced the Spenserian stanza, and from his works we get the impressions of inventiveness and intrepidity. On the whole the outlook of the writers during this age was broad and independent. During the Elizabethan age Drama made a swift and wonderful leap into maturity. The drama reached the splendid consummation in the hands of the age, particularly during the Jacobean period there was a decline in dramatic standards. Poetry enjoyed heyday during the Elizabethan age. The whole age lived in a state of poetic fervor. Songs, lyrics and sonnets were produced in plenty, and England became a nest of singing birds. In versification there was a marked improvement. Melody and pictorialism were introduced in poetry Spenser. For the time prose rose to the position of first rate importance." even the development of poetical drama between 1579 and 1629 is hardly more extraordinary than the sudden expansions of English prose and its adaptation to every kind of literary requirement "The dead weight of the Latin tradition gradually passed away and English prose acquired a tradition and universal applications. English novel made its first proper appearance during this age.

Conclusion:-

There is an influence of the Renaissance and Humanism on the age of Shakespeare and The age of Elizabethan, and there is influence of Seneca too. In the age of Elizabethan has a great contribution of University Wits, such as Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Jacobean, Caroline, Webster, Bacon, Wyatt, Spenser and Donne etc. Marlowe is a representative of Elizabethan period or we can call him he is a Child of Elizabethan era. Not only Marlowe but Shakespeare too, why? Because Shakespeare's dramatic art, treatment of history, concept of tragedy, concept of comedy, dramatic romance and his universality etc. As well as other writers also having good contribution in the Elizabethan period. So it became immortal or evergreen or everlasting or we can say the age of Elizabethan open all the door of world.

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