

Ms. Deepika Tiwari

Assistant Professor

Patna Women's College

Email ID – dtdeepikatiwari@gmail.com

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Paper Name – Introduction to 14th to 17th Century Literature

Topic - Restoration Age (1660-1700)

Introduction:

The period from 1660 to 1700 is known as the Restoration Age since monarchy was restored in England with King Charles II coming to throne in 1660. The coming of Charles II led to a complete repudiation of Puritanical ideals. Influenced by their period of exile at the French Court, Charles II and his followers led a flippant and self-indulgent lifestyle. They revolted against everything that was Puritan in name. Puritan restraint was replaced by a licentiousness of conduct. Traditional holidays and festivities, such as Christmas celebrations were revived.

Historical Background:

The restoration of monarchy was accompanied by the re-opening of English theatres which had been closed during Cromwell's Puritan regime and the restoration of the church of England as the National church. Though, Charles II outwardly expressed support for Anglicanism, he had Catholic sympathies. Charles II had no legitimate heir, but only a Catholic brother, James. Anti-Catholic Parliament led by Earl of Shaftesbury tried to prevent the coming of James to the throne. Charles, however, defended the royal line against

Parliament's attempt to determine the succession. The return of tensions between King and Parliament led to emergence of political factions or 'parties' in Parliament (Whigs and Tories) with Tories supporting the royal prerogative and Whigs challenging Kings priorities and agenda. This whole attempt to exclude James from the throne was called as 'The Exclusion Crisis'. Charles ended this crisis by dissolving the parliament. James II was finally crowned as the king in 1685.

James II imposed severe civil disabilities on Roman Catholics and Non-conformists. He also issued two Declarations of indulgence for Catholics and Quakers in Scotland. However, troubled with the king's Catholic sympathies, the Parliament engineered a way to oust the Stuart King. They joined hands with the Dutch William III of Orange-Nassau who successfully invaded England with his fleet. James II fled London while William of Orange and his wife, Mary II were established as the king and queen. The Parliament thus successfully changed the government and proved its superiority to the king. The overthrow of James I through the united efforts of the English Parliamentarians and the Dutch William of Orange is known as the **Glorious Revolution of 1688**.

Literature of the Restoration Age:

The writers of Restoration Age drove out the moral earnestness and seriousness, which had characterized the Puritan writers and replaced it with a spirit of gaiety. Because of the French influence on English court, the literature of the age was influenced by French models.

Comedies of Moliere, the tragedies of Corneille and Racine and the satires, epistles and versified essays of Boileau were taken as inspiration. In the literature of the age, one sees a change from fancy to wit and from poetry to prose. Pamphlet literature also came into trend. Two diarists, John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys belong to this period. One of the most popular text was Butler's *Hudibras* which ridiculed the Puritans.

Drama was the most popular genre in the Restoration period. Two types of plays ruled the drama of this period. The first was heroic plays, which presented characters of almost superhuman stature and their predominant themes were exalted ideals of love, honour, and courage. The second was Restoration Comedy of Manners which satirized the ideals, mannerisms and behaviour of the upper class society. Dryden is the representative writer of this age.

Features of Heroic Drama:

- Also known as heroic tragedy.
- Had larger than lives heroes and heroines.
- Highly rhetorical dialogues and exotic locales.
- Written in heroic couplet.
- The plot of the play involved the fate of an empire.
- Love and valour were the main subjects of the heroic drama.
- They were influenced by French classical tragedy and its dramatic unities.
- Though Dryden was the main exponent of heroic drama, it was Sir William D'Avenant who first established the mode.

Features of Comedy of Manners:

- Elaborate plots (complex)
- Extramarital affairs
- Intrigues such as spying and forgeries
- Indicative of sexual licentiousness.
- Representative of high society of Restoration age.

Note: Due to sexual frankness and openness, Restoration comedy of manners has also been criticized for being immoral. Jeremy Collier, for instance attacked Restoration playwrights for bringing debauchery and profanity on stage in his anti theatre pamphlet, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*.

Major Writers of Comedy of Manners:

1. George Etherege (1635-91)
2. William Wycherley (1640-1715)
3. William Congreve (1670-1729)
4. John Vanbrugh (1664-1726)
5. George Farquhar (1677-1707)