

References and study material on

Restoration and Eighteenth Century English Literature – Paper I

M.A. English II Semester

Topic- The Coverly Papers

By Mr. Amol Mendhe

Addison, Joseph (1672-1719) and Steele, Richard (1672-1729):

In English literature the names of Joseph Addison and Steele were always associated on account of their collaboration in the periodical essay. Even though their characters were curiously contrast in nature, they were good friends in their literary career. Steele was a thorough Bohemian, easy going, spend thrift leading a life of carefree nature. He was generous, loved ,good and pure aid always sympathetic to others.

Addison was polished gentleman brought up in an urban atmosphere had refined tastes and manners with shy and self-conscious nature. Addison and Steele were both born in 1672 and were educated in London and at Oxford. They widely differed in their personalities perhaps that supplemented one another in the most successful literary partnership in English literature.

Addison distinguished himself as the best composer of Latin poetry of his time. He intended to join church even from his boyhood days but he was diverted by the Government in 1699 by offering a pension to travel in the continent so that he would become a successful diplomat. Steele on the other hand ran away from Oxford, joined Guards regiment in London disguising his real name. He rose to the rank of officers and became Captain Steel. He was a dynamic companion to the fashionable wits of the town. He embraced this easy life by writing and publishing little treatise. "The Christian hero" published in 1701 became very popular. His comedies and other works showed his tendency in a ready sense of humour, but still they were significantly moral in purpose. He was aware that he was working with spirit of his age well represented by the influential society for the Reformation of manners. He resigned his army commission and became gentleman waiter to Prince George, the queen's husband in 1706.

He was appointed to the editorship of "The Gazette". His letters to his second wife "dear prune" revealed his charming good nature and shameless habitual spendthrift nature in his financial affair Addison went abroad on pension in 1699, learnt French language and observed men and manners of the places wherever he went. Addison was rewarded and was appointed as Commissioner of Appeals and became a thorough "Whig" with his serene and quiet manners. In 1706 he became Under Secretary of State, entered House of Commons in 1708. Both Addison and Steele were the members of the Kit-Cat Club, a

selected group of fashionable Whig wits. Since they were unusually talented in their literary activities, they were drawn into the Cortex of politics of those days.

Steele launched "The Tattler" on April 21, 1709 under the pseudonym of Isaac Biker Staff. Even in the choosing of the title he was humorous and ironical saying that he chose the title to show respect to the fair sex. He promised light entertainment but had serious purpose of improving tastes and manners. As an arbiter of manners, he described all the infinite verities of vanity, affectation, ill nature and hard-heartedness that established in the society. He adopted the style of writing from the various coffee houses of London. He exposed the follies and foibles of human behaviour. He intensely observed "false arts of life" there and with humour, effectively expressed in his magazines. He said, "A general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour was the most needed aspect. Steele was determined to broaden the social base of English culture. "The Tattler" became popular overnight, Addison got them even in Dublin and sent his contributions. But The Tattler remained essentially Steel's paper until 271 issues. It was terminated in January 1711.

Then Addison & Steele started joint effort and brought out "The spectator" on 1 March 1711. It was a daily and to publish such a paper every morning was the test of the time. It was real proof of their versatility and resourcefulness. They brought out 555 issues of spectator and joined hands for this remarkable success in their literary career with occasional help from their friends' up to December 1712. The method they adopted through the media of periodical essays was highly appreciable and highly significant in the history of English literature. After 18 make it more genuine and realistic Romantic essayists were ready to develop a new taste, which made periodical essays to disappear in the oblivion. A Historian of English literature observed that both Addison and Steele set themselves to break down two opposing forces of their time i.e., Restoration and Puritanism. Restoration was there with no standard of manners, living without higher level of intellectual thinking. Even the political changes were making life lewd and nobody gave importance to the restoration of the culture. People were fed up with fanaticism practiced by unwanted restriction of the Puritans and they rebelled against it when the opportunity came in their way.

But Addison and Steele worked hard to restore the culture of the English by balancing these two extremes and worked for their national life. Their use of wit, humour and satire that made all the difference. They wrote with good humour. Their success lied in their meeting of all class and to understand the feelings of the ordinary class of the society. At the same time through their writings they made those mankind aware of decency and sound sense. They did their best to draw women into the currents of the intellectual life, which was considered eccentric in those days. The "character" study which was in practice long before became personal and vital with their humour. This was essential contribution to the development of novel and it was a stage in the evolution of the genre.

The periodical essay of Addison and Steele was light, informal, graceful and elegant conversational. It was distinctly a social product where the readers had due respect for the author. It was easy and natural in style, without familiarity or eccentricity. There was a trend towards secularization in 18th century. In periodical essays both the writers wrote about Quasi-Episcopal characters so that every reader understood about Atheism, infidelity and Christian revelation months. Spectator was revived by Addison alone up to 1714. Totally they published 635 essays. Out of which Addison wrote 274 and Steele wrote 240, remaining 121 were the works of various friends.

These periodical essays functioned in two ways i.e., entertainment and instructions were given in new form, which became alluring to the readers. The Tattler and the Spectator is "one of the happiest inventions of modern times". It had intrinsic excellence, which gave it the quality of sensibility. In order to make his "morning lectures" to be welcomed by the polite and sociable audience Mr. Spectator used the skill of easy conversational style in the essays. The same manner was adopted by Montaigne and his followers before two centuries. Mr. Spectator avoided majestic manner of speaking and he spoke as a man of the world. It was the ambition to bring philosophy to the common man out of library, schools and colleges and to make it to be discussed at tea tables and in coffee houses.

Both the "Tattler" and "The Spectator" gave readers broad minded and chivalrous treatment of women and their marriage state, their support for the better education of women and Steele's characteristic humorous treatment of children sympathetically Sir Roger de Coverley, Lord Rochester, Sir Andrew Freeport, captain sentry were some of the representative caricatures done by the writers. Mr. Spectator was the most important member of the club. Through his friends he was enabled to look over the whole nation and abroad and successfully understood all sections of the English people and brought them into good humour with one another. Addison and Steele were more journalistic and they limited themselves to political and economic issues of the day. But the cult of Latin classics made them to seriously concerned with manners and moral with that of good judgement and taste in Arts. Addison praised the value of "Paradise Lost" in a series of Spectator papers, which enhanced Milton's already reputed works. His essays on "The pleasures of the Imagination" influenced aesthetic theory for a century. Addison prose style was chosen to regard as the most perfect in the English language. Dr Johnson complements stating "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, an elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volume's of Addison". Apart from political journalism, i.e., in "Spectator", Addison wrote another important classical tragedy. Addison became secretary of the state's "Whig Party", after marrying countess Dowager of Warwick. He led a happy life. But at the end, because of difference over political issues with Steele he suffered a lot. In 1715 Steele enjoyed the favour of Whig leaders. His last comedy "The conscious lover" was victorious and a contribution to the literature of the sensibility. The essence of periodical essays was blending seriousness and lightness of touch was waning out. The form was not sustaining in the new age. The wave of Romantic flood was taking

away the qualities of periodical essay giving way to tone of certainty in the 18th Century. Influences of new age and political events made it impossible for the survival of old tradition. Therefore Romantic essay writing had some tendency of autobiography and they put forth their own idiosyncrasies to make it more genuine and realistic Romantic essayists were ready to develop a new taste, which made periodical essays to disappear in the oblivion. A Historian of English literature observed that both Addison and Steele set themselves to break down two opposing forces of their time i.e., Restoration and Puritanism. Restoration was there with no standard of manners, living without higher level of intellectual thinking. Even the political changes were making life lewd and nobody gave importance to the restoration of the culture. People were fed up with fanaticism practiced by unwanted restriction of the Puritans and they rebelled against it when the opportunity came in their way. But Addison Steele worked to restore the culture of the English by balancing these two extremes and worked for their national life. Their use of wit, humour and satire that made all the difference. They wrote with good humour. Their success lied in their meeting of all class and to understand the feelings of the ordinary class of the society. At the same time through their writings they made those mankind aware of decency and sound sense. They did their best to draw women into the currents of the intellectual life, which was considered eccentric in those days. The “character” study which was in practice long before became personal and vital with their humour. This was essential contribution to the development of novel and it was a stage in the evolution of the genre. The periodical essay of Addison and Steel was light, informal, graceful and elegant conversational. It was distinctly a social product where the readers had due respect for the author. It was easy and natural in style, without familiarity or eccentricity. There was a trend towards secularization in 18th century. In periodical essays both the writers wrote about Quasi-Episcopal characters so that every reader understood about Atheism, infidelity and Christian revelation. They excluded political news which was safe and attracted common readers enhancing the circulation. The main reasons for the success of the periodicals was that they kept in mind the tastes and requirements both the sexes constantly and wrote for the general public. The influence of periodical essay made for clarity, simplicity and literary good manners. Literary criticism became the first and foremost function of essays in the periodicals. Brevity, surprisingly good quality and unpretentious essays were the common things in periodicals.

Contribution of Dr. Johnson- Short note

Dr. Johnson (1709-84) was very impressive and well known figure of his times. We find easy to consider middle years of 18th Century as anything but the age of Johnson. He read voraciously among his father's stock of books and enabled him to be the best qualified for the university. He studied in Oxford and travelled to London with David Garrick.

After few poetic works he worked for Eight years to complete his “plan of a dictionary of the English language”. Earl of Chesterfield who was indifferent to Dr. Johnson when the work

was going on wrote two essays for "The world" and praised Johnson. Johnson wrote reply. This masterpiece of English prose gave death blow to the system of patronage was the subject for much talk at that time. The Dictionary, even though inadequate as it was by comparison with modern standards of lexicography, was a great achievement. The basic principles of modern dictionary were first laid down by Johnson.

The Dictionary was published in two massive volumes in 1755. In 1750 started a periodical called "Rambler" in the time of the spectator. Its issues appeared up to March 1752. This was followed by "Idler" a series of essays. In 1759 he wrote his philosophical tale of Rasselas, prince of Abyssinia. Johnson and Boswell founded Literary Club in 1764. Johnson was fond of company, which stimulated his mind and provided ease from his melancholic mood. In 1756 he issued proposals for a new edition of Shakespeare. The edition was published in 1765 in eight volumes. Johnson's work on Shakespeare was very valuable to critics since it gave superb knowledge of Elizabethan theatre. His preface praised the genius of dramatist with any tint of jealousy. He defended three rules of unities and ranked him with Homer. He published four political pamphlets. In defence of the government he published "Taxation no Tyranny". In that he replied to the to the protests of the American colonies.

The greatest project of his old age, The Lives of the Poets (1749-81) to which he devoted several years since the bookseller wanted biographical and critical introduction to all the poets after 1600. On men and books, he spoke his mind in his commanding and fearless manner. He raised a storm of criticism. Johnson commented in detail of significant English poetry from Cowley to his own day. Johnson called himself a lazy dog since he never went voluntarily for writing. He produced a considerable amount of miscellaneous literary work, such as reviews, prefaces, essays for periodicals etc. As he grew older, his writing approached more than easy style of informal talk. His style is highly Latinized in vocabulary and in sentence structure. It has great strength nobility and dignity because he wrote involved with the life's experiences.

