

Core English 301

Hist.of Eng. Lit. 1832-1890

UNIT 1:

01. Literary Features of The Victorian Age

Δ *Introduction:*

The Victorian age was one of the most remarkable periods of the Eng. Lit..

It marked the growth of the Eng. Novel , and laid the foundation of Eng. Prose on a surer footing.

In his famous poem *'Pippa Passes'*, **Robert Browning** echoed the Victorian era through this stanza,

"The year's at the spring,

And day's at the morn;

Morning's at seven;

The hill-side's dew -pearled;

The lark's on the wing;

The snail's on the then,

God's in his heaven-

All's right with the world!

- from Act I: : Morning.

_Prominent lit features of the age:

(1) The note of individuality-

(2) Prose & Novel

- (3) Deep Moral Note
- (4) The note of Revolt
- (5) A note of Pessimism
- (6) Impact of Science
- (7) A note of Patriotism
- (8) It's Morality
- (9) The new Education

Δ *In details:*

{1} The Note of Individuality-

The note of individuality was the hallmark of Victorian literature.

The literary figures of the Victorian age were endowed with marked originality in *outlook, character & style.*

"In Macaulay, there was much of the energy & enterprise of the self made man.

Tennyson loved to sing the praises of sturdy independence.

In Dickens' books there are perhaps, more originals than those of any other novelist in the world.

The Bronte Sisters pursued their lonely path in life with the pride and endurance learnt at Haworth Parsonage.

Carlyle & Browning cultivated manner full of eccentricity, & even Thackeray, though more regular in style than his contemporaries, loved to follow a haphazard path in the conduct of his stories, indulging in unbounded comment and digression.

{2} Prose & Novel-

The Victorian age was essentially the age of Prose & Novel.

"Though the age produced many poets; and two deserve to rank among the greatest",

Says W.J.Long, "nevertheless this is emphatically an age of Prose and novel. The novel in this age fills a place in which the drama is held in the days of Elizabeth; and never before, in any age, or language, had the novel appeared in such numbers and in such perfection."*

{3} Deep Moral Note:

Victorian literature in its varied aspects was marked by a deep moral note.

The second marked characteristic of the age is *that literature, both in prose and poetry, seems to depart from the purely artistic standard of art's sake and to be actuated by a definite moral purpose.*

Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin were primarily interested in their message to their countrymen.

There were teachers of England & were inspired by a conscious moral purpose *to uplift & instruct their fellowmen!*

Behind the fun and sentiment of logical studies of George Eliot, lay hidden a definite moral purpose to sweep away error and to bring out vividly in unmistakable terms the underlying truth of human life.

The literature of the Victorian age *was co-related to the social and political life of the age.*

{4} The Note of Revolt:

A *few literary artists of this age struck* the note of Revolt *against the materialistic tendencies of the age, and sought to seek refuge in the overcharged atmosphere of the middle ages.*

An *escapist note is also perceptible* in the Victorian literature, and this particularly *noticed in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite poets.*

The *Rossetti delved in the folklore and diablerie of the middle ages.*

Morris busied himself in its *legends and sagas.*

There were some *minor reversions to classicism*, but taken largely, literature of the age continued to be romantic, in the novelty and variety of its form, in its search after undiscovered springs of truth and beauty, in its emotional and imaginative intensity.

The literature of the Victorian age, inspite of its insistence on *rationality,* and an order born or of reason, could not completely cutt off from the main springs of romanticism.

The *spirit of Romanticism continued to influence the innermost consciousness of the age.*

It *affected the works of Tennyson, Thackeray, Browning and Arnold.*

Between the years *1875-'80 the romantic inspiration was again in the ascendant.*

{5} A Note of Pessimism:

A note of Pessimism, *doubt and despair runs through Victorian literature and is noticed especially in the poetry of Matthew Arnold & Arthur Hugh Clough.*

Though a note of Pessimism *runs through the literature of the age, it cannot be dubbed as a literature of bleak Pessimism and dark despair.*

A *note of idealism and optimism* is also struck *by poets like Browning* and *prose writers like Ruskin* brings out the courageous optimism of the age.

Stedman's Victorian Anthology is, on the whole, a most inspiring book of poetry.

Great essayists like Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, and great novelists like Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot inspire us with their faith in humanity and uplift us by their buoyancy and large charity.

{6} Impact of Science:

The literature of the age is considerably modified by the impact of science.

" It is the scientific spirit, and all that the scientific spirit implied, its certain doubt, its care for the minuteness and truth of observation, its growing interest in social processes, and the conditions under which life is lived that is central fact in Victorian literature".

The *questioning spirit in Clough, the Pessimism of James Thomson, the melancholy of Matthew Arnold, the fatalism of Fitzgerald,* are all the *outcome of the skeptical tendencies evoked by scientific research.*

Tennyson's poetry is also considerably influenced by the undernotes of scientific research can be heard in *'In Memorium'*

Charlotte Bronte, Dickens, Kingsley and Reade give place to points in biology, psychology, pathology.

{7} A Note of Patriotism-

A note of patriotism runs through *Victorian literature, Dickens and Disraeli are inspired by a national pride and a sense of greatness in their country's superiority, over other nations.*

Tennyson strikes the patriotic note in the following lines:

"It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited freedom chose,
A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where freedom slowly broadens down,
From precedent to precedent."

In one direction *the literature of the Victorian age achieved a salient and momentous advance over the literature of the Romantic Revival.*

The poets of the Romantic Revival were *interested in nature, in the past, and in a lesser degree in art, but they were not intensively interested in men and women.*

Wordsworth the dalesman of the lakes were a part of the scenery they moved in.

" The Victorian age extended to the complexities of human life, the imaginative sensibility which it's predecessor had brought to bear on nature and history. The Victorian poets and novelists added humanity to nature and art as the subject matter of literature."

{8} It's Morality-

Nearly *all observers of the Victorian age are struck by its extreme deference to the conventions.*

To a *later age these men to smoke in public and for a lady to ride a bicycle.*

In literature it's amply reflected....., *Tennyson is the most conspicuous example in poetry creating the priggishly complacent Sir Galahad and King Arthur, Dickens, perhaps the most representative of the Victorian novelist, took for his model the old picaresque novel; but it's almost laughable to observe his anxiety to be 'moral'.*

{9} The New Education-

The Education Acts, *making a creation measure of education compulsory,rapidly produced an enormous reading public.*

The *cheapening of printing and paper increased the demand for books, so that the production was multiplied.*

The *most popular form of literature was the novel, and the novelists responded with a will.*

Much of their works was *of a high standard o much so that it has been asserted by competent critics that the middle years of the nineteenth century were the richest in the whole history of the novel.*

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