

### **3<sup>rd</sup>-lecture**

## **Romanticism**

Romanticism is a difficult term to define as it stands for several things together. For instance, it has been associated with the word 'romance' of the mediaeval period which had a certain feeling of remoteness and a faraway atmosphere particularly regarding the landscape, fields of tearing and bravery, chivalry; belief in supernatural, chance and magic; women worship etc. Hence, originally the word 'romantic' signified the qualities in these semi-historical cycles, such as, "far-fetched and opposed to fact." In the late 17th and 18th centuries, the term connoted "wild, extravagant and improbable". The diarists Evelyn and Pepys used it in the sense of Gothic, that is, "irregular, wild and fantastic".

It is strange that the poets now known as 'Romantic poets', such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats did not call themselves 'Romantic'. This term was attached to them later in the 19th century. Wordsworth had considered 'romantic' as something "extravagant, excessive, and even undesirable".

Walter Pater, an essayist and a literary critic, defines romanticism as "addition of strangeness to beauty". In his view the crucial elements of romanticism are "curiosity and the love of beauty". Here Peter is referring to the beauty won by strong imagination out of likely or remote things. But his definition is not complete, for all poetry is an addition of strangeness to beauty. To T. S. Eliot, the term 'romantic' signified 'the individual' and even 'revolutionary'.

### **- Various Meanings of the Term 'Romanticism'**

In modern English usage we generally find four distinct meanings of the term 'romanticism'. That is:

1. As opposed to usual: Something imaginative, remote from everyday life and experience, idealized, and expressing vague longings away from the ordinary.
2. As opposed to expected: Phenomenal, unrealistic, pertaining to dreamy fairyland.
3. Also as opposed to the literal: Symbolic, mystic and unseen.
4. Lastly, as opposed to conventional: Striking, passionate, picturesque, unevenly beautiful.

### **-Characteristics of Romanticism Movement**

We generally interpret and analyze 'Romanticism' in terms of characteristics it has or in contrast to 'Classicism'. If Classicism suggests objectivity, outer experience, universal values, feelings of broad experience of the existing order, sense of

detachment preference for quiet, poise and conformity; 'Romanticism' suggests subjectivity, inner experience, personal values, feelings of inadequacy, excessive egoism (including pessimism), impulse to adventure commerce spirit of revolt, thirst for freedom, etc.

Hence, the **twelve (12) major characteristics of 'Romanticism'** period are:

- Love of Liberty
- Interest in the supernatural and the mysterious
- The revolutionary zeal
- The mediaeval imaginative faculty
- New experiments in verse
- Simplicity of diction
- Humanism
- Love for Nature
- Expression of melancholy
- Themes of Solitude
- Spontaneity
- Lucid sensory descriptions

Romanticism was arguably the largest artistic movement of the late 1700s. Its influence was felt across continents and through every artistic discipline into the mid-nineteenth century, and many of its values and beliefs can still be seen in contemporary poetry.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact start of the romantic movement, as its beginnings can be traced to many events of the time: a surge of interest in folklore in the early to mid-nineteenth century with the work of the brothers Grimm, reactions against neoclassicism and the Augustan poets in England, and political events and uprisings that fostered nationalistic pride.

Romantic poets cultivated individualism, reverence for the natural world, idealism, physical and emotional passion, and an interest in the mystic and supernatural. Romantics set themselves in opposition to the order and rationality of classical and neoclassical artistic precepts to embrace freedom and revolution in their art and politics. German romantic poets included Fredrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and British poets such as Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, George Gordon Lord Byron, and John Keats propelled the English romantic movement. Victor Hugo was a noted French romantic poet as well, and romanticism crossed the Atlantic through the work of American poets like Walt

Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe. The romantic era produced many of the stereotypes of poets and poetry that exist to this day (i.e., the poet as a tortured and melancholy visionary).

Romantic ideals never died out in poetry, but were largely absorbed into the precepts of many other movements. Traces of romanticism lived on in French symbolism and surrealism and in the work of prominent poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Rainer Maria Rilke.

### **Romanticism Characteristics in Literature**

Romanticism stressed that literature must reflect the spontaneous and unaffected in humans as well as in nature. The Romantics gave priority to inner call in order to fully explore the world of the spirit. They attempted to explore the mysteries of life, and thus understand it better. It was this search for the hidden world that gave rise to the Romantics' inspiration and made poets of them. Their intention was to appeal to the complete self, rather than the logical mind. That is, the whole range of intellectual faculties, senses and emotions became their prime focus.

Here are some **major characteristics of Romanticism in literature**:

- believe in an ulterior reality.
- imagination as the most important gift that the poet can have.
- passionate love for the visible world, sometimes their approach is highly sensuous.
- exploration of the unknown aspects of mankind.
- naturalism (including love for nature and man in simple surroundings) and supernaturalism.
- mysticism, glory of the past, and mysticism.

### **4. History of Romanticism in Literature: A Brief History of English Romantic Movement**

The history of Romanticism is quite old. The ancient Western philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato were romantic. The famous French writers like Victor Hugo and Rousseau were also romantic. The Mediaeval romances were certainly romantic in nature. Furthermore, Elizabethan literature was also romantic. All the major qualities of Romanticism enumerated in the preceding paragraphs were present in the literature of the Elizabethans.

#### **4.1. The Elizabethans: The First Romantics**

It is roughly estimated that the English Romantic Movement began in 1798 when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the *Lyrical Ballads*. But it is wrong to assign any definite date to it. It was not a sudden outburst, but the result of a long, gradual growth and development.

The poets of the Romantic school—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron etc—were not even the first Romantics of England. Because Elizabethan literature is essentially romantic in spirit. It is replete with the same sense of wonder and mystery, curiosity and restlessness, love of adventure and daring, the was characteristic of the poets of the early 19th century. According to a literary critic Albert BeGuin “The romantic quest is for the remote and distant”, Therefore, in this sense, “the Elizabethans were our first Romantics.”

#### **-The Decline of Elizabethan’s Romanticism**

It was during the Augustan Age that Romanticism of Elizabethans suffered a total decline. The Augustan literature was mainly rational and intellectual. It was also deficient in emotion as well as imagination. It particularly dealt with the aristocratic and artificial life of the upper classes in London. Moreover, the form and diction of Augustan literature were as artificial as its theme. It lacked feeling and love for nature as well as for those who resided outside the narrow confines of fashionable London society.

Augustan literature merely confined itself to the heroic couplet and to the utter disregard of the ancient English meters. Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Romantic poets, revolted against this artificiality and dry intellectuality of the Augustan’s pseudo classics. Thus, began the English Romantic Movement (1798-1824), also known as ‘Romanticism’.

#### **- The Romantic Revival of Poetry**

Towards the end of the 18th century there was a new dawn. The teachings of Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire along with the French Revolution heralded a new age. Once more, like the Renaissance, a new vista opened out before Imagination that discovered a new territory of human life. ‘Liberty Fraternity and

Equality', the watch-words of the Revolution, ushered in a golden age. Mother Earth was discovered anew. All this revived in literature that same hopefulness, humanism and curiosity that characterized the Elizabethan Age.

In the age of Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, there was a revival of the passionate-ness and restlessness, the same sense of wonder and mystery that characterized the Elizabethans. The Romantics revived the spirit as well as the forms and subjects of Elizabethan literature—the sonnet, the lyric, the pastoral, the blank verse drama, the Spenserian stanza and the ballad. The great Elizabethans' richness of language, fullness of imagination, lyricism, picturesqueness, and the vastness of conception became inspiration for Romanticism poetry.

That's why, the period from 1798 to 1824 is called 'the Romantic Revival of Poetry'.