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# QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

## BRITISH POETRY

M.E.G.-1

Time: 3 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt five questions in all. Question No. 1 is compulsory.

**Q. 1. Explain any two of the following passages with reference to the context and supply brief critical comments wherever necessary:**

(a) **The phoenix riddle hath more wit**

**By us, we two being one, are it**

**So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit,**

**Wee dye and rise the same, and prove**

**mysterious by this love.**

**Ans. Ref.:** These lines have been taken from John Donne's *'The Canonisation'*.

**Context:** The context is the poet celebrates the realisation of ultimate bliss through love.

**Comment:** The poet likens his union with his beloved to that of the phoenix. The oneness, uniqueness and neutrality to the outside world are suggested through this similarity. Like the phoenix, they burn themselves to be consumed by power of love and are re-generated. The poet does not consider physical passion to be considered the ultimate aim of love, but only a stage of development in the process towards being canonised.

(b) **Born to no pride, inheriting no strife,**

**Nor marrying discord in a noble wife,**

**Stranger to civil or religious rage,**

**The good man walk'd innoxious thro' his age.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-5, Page No. 168, 'The Neglected Genius'.

(c) **When the stars threw down their spears,**

**And water'd heaven with their tears,**

**Did he smile his work to see?**

**Did he who made the Lamb make thee?**

**Ans. Ref.:** These lines have been extracted from Blake's *'The Tyger'*.

**Context:** This is the penultimate stanza of the poem which has total six stanzas. After presenting Tyger as a strikingly sensuous image, the poet projects it as a symbolic character.

**Comment:** Here, the poet reminds the readers that a tiger and a lamb have been created by the same God and raises questions about the implications of this. The poet also uses the images of 'stars' and 'heaven' to give a picture of farfetchedness. He also puts questions to God asking him whether he is happy to see his work in this earth.

(d) **O lady! We receive but what we give,**

**And in our life alone does Nature live!**

**Ans.** These lines are taken from, *Dejection: An Ode*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

**Context:** The speaker recalls a poem that tells the tale of Sir Patrick Spence: In this poem, the moon takes on a certain strange appearance that presages the coming of a storm.

**Comment:** The speaker wishes ardently for a storm to erupt, for the violence of the squall might cure his numb feeling. He says that he feels only a 'dull pain,' "a grief without a pang" – a constant deadening of all his feelings. Speaking to a woman whom he addresses as "O Lady," he admits that he has been gazing at the western sky all evening, able to see its beauty but unable fully to feel it. He says that staring at the green sky will never raise his spirits, for no "outward forms" can generate feelings: Emotions can only emerge from within.

According to the speaker, "we receive but what we give": the soul itself must provide the light by which we may hope to see nature's true beauty – a beauty not given to the common crowd of human beings ("the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd"). Calling the Lady "pure of heart," the speaker says that she already knows about the light and music of the soul, which is Joy. Joy, he says, marries us to nature, thereby giving us "a new Earth and new Heaven, Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud."

**Q. 2. Comment on the images of sensuality in the Amoretti sonnets by Spenser.**

# QUESTION PAPER

December – 2023

(Solved)

## BRITISH POETRY

M.E.G.-1

Time: 3 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt five questions in all. Question No. 1 is compulsory.

Q. 1. Explain any two of the following passages with reference to the context, supplying critical comments wherever necessary :

(a) Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more,  
For lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor,  
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet a non repairs his drooping head,

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'Lycidas' by John Milton.

Explanation: Again, the theme of these lines describe the theme of *Bible*. We know that the theme is simply a collection of elegies which were presented in 1638 and represent the sorrow and death elements of King Edward who was a friend and college-mate of Milton. The king was drowned in 1634 in a shipwreck. The king was deeply associated in poetry before his death and was facing emotional conflicts. Since the king closer to Milton, he carried out the inquires about the sorrows of the former. He studies about the secrets and mysteries of his death that took place in a shipwreck.

This poem reveals the traditions of classical pastoral and imagined individuals as shepherds. Milton is of the view that if poetry fails to safeguard the interest of shepherds, it may not be profession-oriented.

(b) And death shall have no dominion  
Dead men maked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the  
clean bones gone.

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'And Death Shall have No Dominion' by Dylan Thomas.

Explanation: Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 331, 'And Death Shall have No Dominion'.

(c) There dwels sweet love and constant chastity,  
Unspotted fayth and comely womanhood,  
Regard of honour and mild modesty,  
The vertue raynes as queene in royal throne,  
And giveth lawes alone.

Ans. Ref.: This is an extract from Spenser's 'The Epithalamion'.

Context: The poet here celebrates his love for Elizabeth Boyle.

Comment: In these lines, the poet depicts his beloved's virtue – constant chastity, unspotted faith, comely womanhood, mild modesty and regard of honour. He compares her with the Queen in throne who makes laws. Although firmly within the classical tradition, Epithalamion takes its setting and several of its images from Ireland, where Spenser's wedding to Elizabeth Boyle actually took place. Spenser's love for the Irish countryside is clear through his vivid descriptions of the natural world surrounding the couple, while his political views regarding English supremacy is hinted at in the relationship between the bride and groom themselves.

(d) All humane things are subject to decay,  
And, when Fate summons, Monarchs  
must obey.

Ans. Context: These lines have been taken from John Dryden's 'Mac Flecknoe'.

Explanation: These are the opening lines of the poem. Here, Flecknoe is compared with emperor Augustus who has power in the realm of non-sense. It explains that the reigning king of dull poetry, Mac Flecknoe, is retiring from his position and that the throne of dullest poet must now be filled by another writer. The poem then humorously quotes Mac Flecknoe's departing speech. In the speech,

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# BRITISH POETRY

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## Orientations for the Study of Poetry and the Medieval Poet Chaucer



### INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the emergence and the development of the British Poetry, it is really very important to start from the very beginning. First, we need to look at the relationship which both poetry and the visual arts share. Why? The idea is simple. Whenever we look at any painting or for that matter, any piece of visual art, we begin to think about something, something that we think that we can relate it to. Here comes our thought process or imagination into the focus which may take the shape of a literary piece. Therefore, in order to understand and appreciate poetry it is important for us to understand the linkage or connection between the visual art and poetry. We also need to take a look at the usual technical terms like prosody, metre, scansion, etc., which are often used in the study of poetry.

Usually, the study of British Poetry starts with the age of Chaucer. Not because the history of British Poetry starts with Chaucer, but the emphasis on the organized and the systematic development of British poetry started from the age of Chaucer. Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400), who is also regarded as the father of English Poetry by many, was a Middle English poet. It was Middle period which marked the rise of Renaissance. Before this period the British Isle was ruled by the Roman Empire from the first century A.D. until fifth century A.D. The Romans called it the Island Britannia after the Celtic-speaking inhabitants Britons. Somewhere around the fifth century the Roman were attacked by the Germanic invaders who belonged to three different but related tribes. These were the Angles,

the Saxon and the Jutes. The first epic poem written on British Isle was *Beowulf*.

This period is marked as the Old English Period in the British history. Some of the famous poems written during this time are *Widsith* (i.e. ‘the far traveller’, usually considered as the oldest English poem), *The Battle of Burnanbrugh* and *The Battle of Maldon*. These poems tell the story of invasion of Britain in 10th century. Other poems are *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. These poems show us the use of personal emotion and melancholy in the poetry. The finest religious poem of this period is *The Dream of the Rood*.

Now, let us get back to the Middle English period. The Middle English period was culturally dominated by the power of Church and the landlords. Church was the only institution which claimed to be the bridge between God and the Human beings. Illiteracy was very common and people would hardly care to think about it. We will take a closer look at cultural background later.

Chaucer is sometimes considered the source of the English vernacular tradition and the “father” of Modern English literature. His achievement for the language can be seen as part of a general historical trend towards the creation of a vernacular literature after the example of Dante in many parts of Europe. A parallel trend in Chaucer’s own lifetime was underway in Scotland through the work of his slightly earlier contemporary, John Barbour, and was likely to have been even more general, as is evidenced by the example of the Pearl Poet in the north of England.



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Widespread knowledge of Chaucer's works is attested by many poets who imitated or responded to his writing. John Lydgate was one of the earliest poets to write continuations of Chaucer's unfinished *Tales* while Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* completes the story of Cressida left unfinished in his *Troilus and Criseyde*. Many of the manuscripts of Chaucer's works contain material from these poets and later appreciations by the romantic era poets were shaped by their failure to distinguish the later "additions" from original Chaucer. 17th and 18th century writers, such as John Dryden, admired Chaucer for his stories, but not for his rhythm and rhyme, as few critics could then read Middle English and the text had been butchered by printers, leaving a somewhat un-admirable mess. It was not until the late 19th century that the official Chaucerian canon, accepted today, was decided upon, largely as a result of Walter William Skeat's work. One hundred and fifty years after his death, *The Canterbury Tales* was selected by William Caxton to be one of the first books to be printed in England.

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CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

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**FROM THE EVALUATION  
OF THE PORTRAITS TOWARDS  
THE EXPLICATION OF POEMS**

Reading and understanding poetry is not that easy as it may seem. But it certainly does not mean that it is very difficult. No, it is not. All we need to do is to take a systematic approach towards the poetry in order to understand and appreciate it. We need to consider certain points while reading poetry or for that matter any work of literature. These points are:

- (a) The function of the historical background of the age in which the poetry was written.
- (b) Knowledge of the poet's life and other work are important in understanding of poem.
- (c) We need not to focus just on the poem but also need to consider the biographies and the backgrounds of the periods to which different poets belong.

Appreciation of a poem does not only involve providing reasons for liking the poem but also not liking it. But whatever may be the reason it is important to develop an eye for the appreciation. Let us now take a look at the connection or the linkage between the poetry and the visual arts. But before we do so we should understand that the appreciation of poetry and the appreciation of visual art have different criteria.

**EXAMINING TWO PORTRAITS**

The Portrait that shows up on the cover page of the main course book is generally mistaken as the portrait of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge. The important question is why? Technically the lady in the portrait cannot be Saraswati because she lacks many features which are usually found in the portrait of the goddess. She is not sitting on the swan; she does not have four hands whereas Saraswati is often portrayed as sitting on the swan and has four hands. She holds veena in the two hands and a lotus and a book in the other two hands. We do not see all these features in lady of the portrait yet she is confused as the goddess Saraswati.

**Exposé**

People often confuse the lady in the portrait as the Saraswati because they bring to their appreciation of the portrait their prejudices—standards of evaluation—unawares. This does not only apply in case of the portrait but also applies when we see any picture, or read a novel or a short story or a poem.

**The Shepherd**

What will the reaction of a person, who is very well educated in English literature, and has very sound knowledge of British poetry, when he/she is shown a portrait of a shepherd? He/she is very likely to imagine or try to connect it with the host of poets. The question is why? One thing that we need to take into consideration that if the person does not possess the knowledge of British poetry and know nothing about it, he might not be able to connect it with host of poets rather he will try to connect it with something else. But as we are concerned about poetry we will limit ourselves to the person with sound knowledge in poetry.

One parallel construction can be drawn for this is that the first English poet Caedmon (670 A.D.) was a shepherd by profession. Caedmon lived at the monastery Abbess Hilda at Whitby. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of English People* gives us an account of his life. It is quite interesting to know about how Caedmon begun writing poetry. According to Bede he was ignorant of poetry and knew nothing about singing songs. To quote Bede:

... so ignorant of singing he was that sometimes, at feast, where it was a custom that for the pleasure of all each guest should sing in turn, he would rise from the table when he saw the harp coming to him and go home ashamed. Now it happened once that he did this thing at certain festivity, and went to the stable to care for the horses, this duty being assigned to him for the night. As he slept at the usual time, one stood by him saying: "Caedmon, sing me something." "I cannot sing", he answered, "and that is why I came hither from the feast."

But he who spoke to him said again, "Caedmon, sing to me". And he said, "What shall I sing?" and he said, "Sing the beginning of created things."

Thus Caedmon started the singing and now remembered as the first poet of English language.

Another parallel can be drawn with Robert Burns, who according to Henry Mackenzie was 'a Heaventaught ploughman' Burn's father was a poor tenant farmer and after his death Burn decided to migrate to Jamaica as he was unable to support the large family and also to escape the life of a labourer. The portrait of such a shepherd or the labourer may also be linked with the old man depicted in Burn's poem *Man was Made to Mourn, A Dirge*. Robert Burn might have lived the life of a labourer but the difficulty and the labour of his life thought him the true essence of humanity and especially of those classes which are branded as the economically depressed.

Similarly the imaginary portrait we are concerned of can be linked with several other poets. The idea is to get the point that the image that we see in any visual art can be linked with poetry in several ways or at least in one way. Also the so called lower classes of the society and those who live in country have their attachment with poetry since very beginning.

#### **Nature, Country and Artistic Inspiration**

Wordsworth, perhaps, was the only poet among all the Western poets who in order to escape from the chaotic city life chose to live in country where he formulated his own philosophy of nature. Wordsworth in *The Prelude* writes about how river Derwent influenced his thoughts and inspired him to compose poetry:

The one, the fairest of all rivers, loved  
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song  
And, for his alder shades and shallows sent a voice  
That followed along my dreams.

—*The Prelude, Book I*

The man in the imaginary portrait, we are concerned about, is not another Wordsworth for sure, he may not be intellectual as we know nothing about him. But his attachment with the lower class or country side does not in any case provide us the opportunity to claim any sort of superiority over him. People belonging to the country like farmers, shepherd, and the labourers make no less contribution to the society than that of the scholars, intellectual, politicians, and civil servants. Just because these people do not live in the crowd of city does not mean that they in any way are inferior to those who live in city. History tells us that those who chose to live a solitary life have contributed in the social, cultural and intellectual development of the society more than those who live in the crowd of the city. Chanakya, Vyasa and Balmiki can be cited as few.

Many people have praised the country life and reacted against the various unpleasant features of the city life like chaos, pollution, crowdedness, lack of solitude and above all the blind ambitions of people living in city, of which even they themselves are not aware. The country life has its own importance and cannot be ignored; this is one reason that in various poems we encounter the importance of such life against the severe criticism of city life, especially at the time of growing industrialization.

#### **The Woman Holding a String Instrument**

Let us get back to the portrait of the lady on the cover page. The portrait is the copy of a 16th century Mughal painting which is now at Musee Guimet in Paris. It was Humayun who laid the foundation of Mughal School of Art. Due to increasing disinterest of Shah Tahmasp of Persia in painting, Humayun got an opportunity to get the two great masters of painting, namely Mir Sayyid Ali of Tabriz and Adbus-samad of Shiraz, along with himself. They together establish an atelier by recruiting large number of talented painters.

The portrait of the lady with the string instrument suggests in many ways the influence of European art. The folds of her dress along with her pose tell us that who-so-ever created it was influenced by the West. This should not come as a surprise considering the fact that the West started to influence Indian art and painting since 16th century.

Jahangir (1605-27) had an artistic inclination and during his reign Mughal painting developed further. Brushwork became finer and the colours lighter. Jahangir was also deeply influenced by European painting. During his reign he came into direct contact with the English Crown and was sent gifts of oil paintings, which included portraits of the King and Queen. He encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favoured by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in traditional miniatures. He particularly encouraged paintings depicting events of his own life, individual portraits, and studies of birds, flowers and animals. *The Jahangirnama*, written during his lifetime, which is a biographical account of Jahangir, has several paintings, including some unusual subjects such as the sexual union of a saint with a tigress, and fights between spiders.

During the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58), Mughal paintings continued to develop, but they gradually became cold and rigid. Themes including musical parties; lovers, sometimes in intimate positions, on terraces and gardens; and ascetics gathered around a fire, abound in the Mughal paintings of this period.

Among all the European painters it was Albrecht Dürer who influenced the Mughal painting the most. Albrecht Dürer was a German painter, print-maker and theorist from Nuremberg. His prints established his

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reputation across Europe when he was still in his twenties, and he has been conventionally regarded as the greatest artist of the Northern Renaissance ever since. His well-known works include the *Apocalypse Woodcuts*, *Knight, Death and Devil* (1513), *Saint Jerome in his Study* (1514) and *Melencolia I* (1514), which has been the subject of extensive analysis and interpretation. His water colours mark him as one of the first European landscape artists, while his ambitious woodcuts revolutionized the potential of that medium.

Thus, we see that the European influence on Medieval Indian paintings is evident in many ways.

#### Resumé

In his essay *The Evidence of Images* E.H. Gombrich wrote "There are critics who think...that the greatness of an artistic creation lies in its richness, ambiguity, and the interpretability, and that it is both futile and somehow wrong to search for the correct interpretation, the one which author intended", he further affirmed this view and wrote "I do not hold this view. I do not believe that any interpretation is sure and infallible, any more than any other hypothesis can be. But I do think we can try as historians to restore the original context in which these words were intended to function and it is always worthwhile to venture upon this perilous path..." The point is interesting and can be taken as a basic platform of understanding any literary or artistic work. However, one may think that interpretation is something originated by the exaggerated zeal of Western intellectuals or by scientism.

### A PRELUDE TO THE STUDY OF POETRY

As we have already discussed that it is important for us to go through the technical aspect of the poetry. When we talk about poetry we just not talk about the words scribed on a piece of paper we also talk about images and metaphors; symbols and icons; emblem and exemplum. All of these project a visual effect in our mind but in an abstract manner. Apart from these we also have rhythm which is perhaps deeper than others. Rhythm is the combined product of both rhyme and metre. There are other effects as well which help in creation of rhythm, many a times poet him/herself is not aware of all these effects. We will take on to the prosody and will examine its fundamental ideas. Finally, we will look at the art of deciphering the text of the poems. Let us now start by looking at the poem as an abstract entity.

#### THE READING OF LITERATURE

It has often been suggested that a poem should not be read without taking into consideration its origin, context or locale. Poet seems to be living in a state of solitude devoid of all the responsibility of life and lost

in the music of his thoughts. Such picture of poet might seem to be unrealistic in today's world. What we need to understand is that a poet is also a human being just like every other but the difference lies in the fact that a poet chooses a language which seems to be the same as everyone else but in fact it is different in its construction. The language used by a poet is a political tool and not to be forgotten, it is a social artifact.

It would be worthwhile to look at what Derrida said, "the institutional or socio-political space of literary production...does not simply surround works, it affects them in their very structure." Therefore, the background, the context and the locale of the poet are of severe importance.

#### Writing and Reading as Historical Acts

Why history or the background of a poet is important? Why a poem cannot be read as it appears? One may ask these questions. T.S. Eliot while talking about the making of the poet wrote in his *Tradition and Individual Talent*:

...that the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

It has often been seen that few poets cites more frequently the contemporary events in their poems than others but this does not situate their poems historically more than that of those who do not cite contemporary events in their poems.

#### The Subjectivity of a Work of Art

Poets as we know are just like other human beings and live among them. But their creation is not an objective document like that of the 'General theory of Relativity' by Einstein. Poems are highly subjective not only in cases when Wordsworth is writing an autobiographical poem *The Prelude or Tennyson* mourning over the death of his friend in *In Memoriam* but also in cases when Eliot is writing *The Waste Land*. The extent of narcissism can be felt in what Derrida told to Derek Attridge:

At the "narcissistic" moment of, "adolescent" identification...this was above all the desire to inscribe merely a memory or two. I say "only", though I already felt it an impossible and endless task. Deep down, there was something like lyrical movement toward confidences or confessions.

He further writes:

Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens—or fails to happen. What I should be tempted to denounce as a lure - i.e. totalization or gathering up—isn't this what keeps