

Important Aspects of Elizabethan Era

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ABSTRACT

The Elizabethan age is regarded as Golden age of England. It was an age of change and discovery. New ideas, concepts and beliefs were starting to evolve. Religion was one of the major issues during this age. Roman Catholic Church dominated England for many years. People who were against Roman Catholic Church formed their own group known as Protestant Religion. Superstition was an integral part of this era. People were confused about the choice of Religion. Thus, the objective of this research paper is to study the different aspects of Elizabethan Era.

Keywords: Elizabethan Era, Society, Religion, England

Introduction

Elizabethan was the queen of England from 1558 to 1603. It was an era of social religious and political peace. Men and women were free to explore themselves in the field of art and literature. This age is also known as golden age of literature. She allowed multiple regions within her religion to establish peach among people. She was the source of inspiration for the people with the unbounded patriotism which finds a voice in Farey Queen. English Literature was gaining popularity under the reign of Queen Elizabeth by male writers and poets but female writers did not have such independence. Though the age produced some excellent works of prose but essentially t was an age of poetry for its freshness, youth and romantic feelings.

Characteristics of Elizabethan Era

- ❖ **Elizabethan Drama:** Drama became the national passion during Elizabethan Era. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth many public theatres were built on the bank of London. Theatre was the popular medium of entertainment of the people of various classes. Women were not allowed to perform on stages but they could be a part of audience. In the beginning comedies were better than tragedies. The comedy named as *Ralph Roister Doister* written by Nicholas Udall was the first regular comedy in English . The tragedy named as *Gorboduc* written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton was the first regular tragedy. The writers belonged to university wits also contributed in the development of drama. The Successful use of metaphors in text and performances was responsible for the opening of first public theatre known as ‘ **The Theatre; by a carpenter James Burbage**. This age is also regarded as age of experimentation leading to new discoveries which imparted rich content for drama, poetry and prose. The tragedy, the comedy and historical plays were the major forms of drama. The plays of famous playwrights of this era were modeled on Greek tragedy , Attic drama, English miracle plays, morality plays and Interludes. The plays of famous playwrights of this era were modeled on Revenge was the popular theme of drama during this Era. **Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*** are mentioned here. Georg Champion, Thomas Heywood , Ben Johnson, Chirstopher Marlowe and John Lyly were the great dramatists .The use of supernatural elements was another prominent theme as the people of this era was highly superstitious believing in supernatural forces. The literary devices named as *Aside* or *Soliloquy* became also popular to engage with audience. Neither poetry nor the story were capable of expressing the thoughts and actions of human beings therefore literature of this Era turned to the drama and brought the highest stage of its development.
- ❖ **Elizabethan Prose:** Though the Elizabethan age is regarded as the golden age of English poetry and drama, but the influential works of great prose writers can not under

estimated. Prose became more popular with the arrival of English printing press. The theme of Elizabethan prose was mainly dealt with Amusement as well as Instruction . The prose of Elizabethan era can be divided into two parts i.e Fiction and Non Fiction. The fiction of this age was romantic in nature . Some famous forms of fiction along with their practitioners are mentioned below.

i) **The romance of Lyly- Lodge and Greene**

ii) **The pastoral romance – Sir Philip Sidney**

iii) **The picaresque novel – Thomas Nashe**

iv) **The realistic novel- Delony**

The name of Bacon and Hooker can also be cited in the field of Non Fiction. At the beginning, the Elizabethan prose was mainly dealt with the translations of Italian Novella like **Palace of Pleasure by William, Tragically Discourses by Geoffrey Fenton**. Elizabethan prose writers as Lyly, Lodge, Greene, Nashe, Dekker and Sir Philip Sidney can not be avoided. Thomas North's translated work Plutarch's Lives became the centre of attraction of many prose writers. He was capable of weaving into powerful sentences. The beauty of style **Lyly's work Euphues, the Anatomy Wit** lies in the use of indicate alliteration, classical allusion and balanced phrases. **Sir Philip Sydney's Arcadia** was the first pastoral romance in English that was based on the Spanish pastoral romance. The works of great prose writers as **Thomas Lodge's Rosalind, Thomas Dekker's The Seven Deadly Sins of London** and **Thomas Nash's The Unfortunate Traveler or The life of Jack Wilton, Richard Hokker's Of the Ecclesiastical Policy** can be mentioned here . Many writers also tried their hands to translate the Bible. William Tyndale successfully translated the New Testament from Greek and the old Testament from Hebrew. The Renaissance spirit of humanism, liberalism and romanticism also contributed in the growth and development of English prose in Elizabethan age.

- ❖ **Elizabethan Poetry:** Poetry also emerged as the popular form during this era. The Elizabethan poetry was deeply influenced by Renaissance and Reformation therefore it

was similar .but at the same time quite different in theme, subject matter, treatment and out look from the Medieval writers. The language of the poetry was secular and ore closed to modern English. The form of poetry also shifted from narrative poetry to lyrical poetry. The lyrical poetry was mainly concerned with observations and feelings of a single speaker. Poets and dramatists were deeply inspired by Italian forms and genres such as love sonnets, the pastoral and the allegorical epic. Sir Thomas Wyatt brought sonnet from Italy and made it popular in England. Three types of sonnets were popular during this era. 1) **Petrarchan Sonnet**: This type of sonnet has an octave and a sestet rhyming **abba abba cdecde** .2) **Spenserian Sonnet**: This type of sonnet consist of three quatrains and a couplet rhyming **abab bcba ee** 3) **Shakespearan Sonnet**: This sonnet was divided into three quatrains and a couplet but it has different rhyme scheme **abab cdcd efef gg** . Henry Howard The Earl of Surrey introduced the first **Blank Verse** in English. William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sydney, Walter Raleigh and Christopher Marlow are the greatest poets of this age. Edmund Spenser who was also known as the father the poetic diction wrote the famous poem The Fairie Queen.This work also introduced the Spenserian stanza having 8 iambic p-pentameter lines with rhyme scheme **ABABBBCBCC**

- ❖ **Elizabethan Clothes and Costumes**: Clothing was significant thing in the era of Elizabeth .Geometrical shapes had deep influence on the shapes of clothes of this era. The clothes of Elizabethans reflected their social standings. Royals were allowed to wear clothes trimmed with ermine. People of this era were not free to wear the clothes that they desired. They had to follow certain laws while deciding about clothes. Only certain classes were allowed to wear certain fabrics and colors. These laws were known as “**Statutes of Apparel**” that was enforced by Queen Elizabeth on June 1574. The objective was to maintain the social structure and to limit peoples’ expenditure on clothing. The Upper class of Elizabethan era used to wear expensive clothes made of costly velvet, exotic silk and satin. The less noble folk were permitted to wear clothes trimmed with fox or otter. On the other hand the clothes of peasants were made of

English cotton, wool and leather. Woolen clothing was most popular among the working and domestic class as it was cheap. People also used dyes to color the lavish clothing of the noble of Elizabethan England. Men of upper class used to wear loose fitting shirts made of fine silk or linen. Puffy pants, Hats, brooches were also used by them. The man belonged to middle class were allowed to wear white shirts made of fine white linen. But they were not permitted to dye their shirts with any other color. Men of lower class wore shirts having rectangles. Shapes . It was closely fitted to the body and arms. The brightness of color was also a decisive factor as to how expensive it would be. Queen and her immediate used to wear purple color and the lesser women wore colors such as gold, silver , grey , black etc.

- ❖ **Elizabethan Religion:** Catholic and Protestant religions were two major religions during Elizabethan age. Queen Mary I favored the Catholic religion while her sister Queen Elizabeth followed the Protestant belief. Queen Mary I was so rigid in her religion that she ordered to burnt alive those who believed in Protestant Religion. On the other hand Queen Elizabeth treated people of different religions equally. Even to stop religion violence she banned the performances of religious. In spite of Queen Elizabeth's efforts to bring peace among different religions, many Catholics plots were intrigued against her. Catholics wanted to replace Queen Elizabeth with her cousin Mary Queen of Scots. To eradicate religion tensions among people Queen Elizabeth passed two laws under Religious Settlement in 1559. Queen Elizabeth was made the supreme governor of the church. The term 'Supreme Head ' was not used as Christ was seen as Head of the church. In 1591, parliament passed an act to declare that conversion to Catholicism would be treated as treason. She declared Protestantism as official faith of England and also introduced some rules of religious practice and worship. In short the meaning of **Religious Settlement** was the that England was officially protestant but it also gave permission to some traditions of Catholic worship. Queen Elizabeth hoped that this step would make her people happy . But she faced refusal of this settlement not only from Catholics but from extreme Protestants known as Puritans who were not

ready to agree with Catholic Ideas. They wanted to remove all the traces of Catholic Faith. People of this era were highly superstitious and they put the blame of unexplainable events of the works on witches. People became superstitious due to the fear of supernatural powers. For Example they believed that if a black cat crossed your path then that day would be unlucky.

- ❖ **Elizabethan Churches and Bible:** i) Elizabethan Catholics was of view that Latin should be used for Church services and Bible. But Protestants said that the language of Church Services and Bible should be common as it would help the ordinary people to understand them. ii) According to Catholics, priests were the link between God and the people and they should remain unmarried should wear and should devote their lives to God. But Protestants viewed priest Pope and ministers as normal human beings and they should lead wear ordinary robes. People are capable of finding God themselves without the help of priest.iii) Catholics believed that priests and Pope were capable of forgiving the sins by taking gifts or price. But Protestants said God was the supreme power and he could forgive sins.
- ❖ **Condition of Women:** Elizabethan women were not independent in their thoughts and actions. They find literature as a medium to share their views and ideas. They wanted to change the mind set of society towards them. Women's capacities were underestimated by selfish male dominated society as they did not have right t vote or to enter politics. Women were regarded as unimportant part of society as they are supposed to do households works and considered as a source of physical stratification for male. They were not allowed to enter university. Only women belong to noble families had the right of education. Even the female performances in theatres were performed by males. Their subordinate condition can be judged by the quote of John Knox” **Women in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man**”They did not have any legal right on their fathers' property .All Titles would pass from father to son or from brother to brother depends on situation. The only exception was crown .The crown could pass to a daughter and the daughter would have all powers and majesty of a king. This

enabled Mary then Elizabeth to reign. They started to express secretly through writing. The women of this era belonged to their father and then to their husband. Women did not have right to own their property. That's why Queen Elizabeth did not marry because she did not want to hand over her power to a man. Their writing exhibits the desire to fly high and to get independence from male chivalry. Lady Mary worth, Mary Sydney Herbert, Isabella Whitney were major female writers of this era.

❖ **Elizabethan Politics Structure** : The Elizabethan society was divided into the following categories.

i) Monarchy : The political system of Elizabethan era was Monarchy. The complete power was given to the people having higher rank. Queen Elizabeth was the monarch during this era that's why she took all the important decisions. But she could not look after everything herself therefore she had various officials to help her in governing the country wisely and justly. She became the most important figure. Laws could not be passed without her consent. Queen Elizabeth rules the country with the assistance of two important bodies i.e The Privy Council and the Parliament.

ii) The Privy Council: The privy council was an integral part of Elizabethan politics. They were the advisors of Queen Elizabeth who assisted her in politics. The council during Queen Mary was quite large. But Queen Elizabeth limited the size of council as she believed that large number of people having different ideas would cause problems. There were Nineteen members in the first council but at the time of her death in 1603 the size of council was reduced to thirteen members.

iii) Parliament: Tudor parliament had two houses i.e the House of Lords (upper house) and the House of Common(lower house). Aristocrat and Bishops were of the House of Lords while common people belonged to the House of Common. Elections were organized for the common house and the man who was supported by the locality was elected. Only men who had certain wealth had the rights of voting. The main objective of parliament was to grant Queen Elizabeth money when she needed it. However,

Queen Elizabeth could make her decision without parliament's consent that was known as Royal Proclamation.

Economical Condition: The initial thirty years of Queen Elizabeth reign was the witnessed of Prosperity and Stability but rising population led to increasing poverty. England's economy during this era was mainly concerned with agriculture. Mostly people lived in villages and they did heavy works as weeding, sowing seeds, harvesting etc. Women were in taking care of household works such as cooking, cleaning and sewing. The small town people were generally craftsman, butchers, bakers, tailors, blacksmiths and carpenters. Queen Elizabeth also took an important Economic decision to issue a new monetary system to set a standard amount of valuable price. This gave the confidence to the businessmen to enter into long term financial contract. The main article of England's trade was woolen. No doubt this era was an golden age of culture and Exploration but increasing population and rising poverty became a huge problem. Poverty was regarded to be your own fault in Elizabethan but this attitude started to change at the end of this age and the Government took decision to raise the standard of living of poor. They had taken this decision because they feared that growing number of poor would form ganged or might spread diseases.

Conclusion: Thus, Elizabethan age was a golden age in the history of English Literature. This Research paper is mainly concerned with the evolution of drama, poetry, prose during this age. It also deals with the conditions of Elizabethan women as well as political, economical, religious temperament of this era. Queen Elizabeth did her best to bring harmony among people of different classes and religions. She was the epitome of national spirit and patriotism. No doubt the people of this time saw many political ups and downs but at the time this era was responsible for providing opportunities for self analysis and selfexploration.

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