

# Jonathan Swift as a satirist (BA Part1 Eng hons 2018-21)

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Satire is a literary device which is intended to reveal human follies. The satirist is fed up with the existing condition of society and intends to make complete overhauling of the social structure using ironical expressions, witty remarks and conceits. Satires are of different kinds which include irony, Sarcasm, Lampoon and caricature. 18<sup>th</sup> century provided a fertile ground for the development of satire in England. The literature of the period was entirely confined to the depiction of activities happening around the royal circle. Coffee houses emerged as the significant power centres to discuss the political activities. Almost all the major writers of this period took keen interest in the composition of satirical works. Prominent among those being John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift. Dryden wrote the Hind and the Panther, Absalom and Achitophel, Pope wrote the rape of the lock and Dunciad and Jonathan Swift wrote Gulliver`s travels, A tale of a tub and The battle of the books. They wrote basically political satires to express their dissatisfaction over the existing socio-political condition of English society.

Swift was a great scholarly genius .But his talent was not recognized by English society. His soaring political ambition suffered immensely with people with lesser talent enjoying significant position by virtue of their proximity with the royalty His repeated urge to accord due respect was turned a deaf ear. This growing ignorance of his genuine demands sown the seeds of dissent in him and he turned

rebellious against royalty for elevating those having lesser talent to high pedestal. Through his successive works Swift has highlighted the corruption prevailing in various sectors and brought the govt. to the dock for step-motherly treatment for his political opponents. Swift was an staunch supporter of the whigs who were unfortunately voted out of power which virtually sealed his prospect of a significant position. Through his successive works Swift has expressed his grudge and despair for ignoring the rightful claims of the deserving one or righteous people.

His first book Gulliver's Travels is a political satire in which he has laughed at the social structure through the successive voyages of Gulliver which gives credence to those having lesser talent and requires a complete overhauling .During his voyage to Lilliput or the country of the dwarfs he misconceived himself to be the most powerful person on Earth but on the next voyage to the brobdingnag he was reduced to the status of a dwarf himself and was forced to read the writings on the wall. It gave a severe jolt to his misconception .Gulliver realized his mistake. His voyage to hunhumland is even more significant where human beings are treated as horses and the later serving as their masters. This episode is a more bitter or pungent remark on the work culture of human beings who are relegated to even a lower position of that of a horse .Swift is known for his harsh comments. Sometimes the charges of cynicist were labelled against him which are virtually the outburst of the ill treatment which he meted out in English society and he gave a fitting reply by his harsh comments forcing the authorities to reconsider their decision and come out from the false paradise in the larger interest of society. It is suggested that Swift worked with the stroke of the hammer in order to make his voice heard. In a pamphlet entitled The Modest Proposal Swift has made a very harsh comment over the growing population of

Ireland and suggested that the infants should be sent to the slaughter house to be cut into pieces and served as a meal to the affluent classes in the restaurants. Besides adding substantially to the royal exchequer this move will help curb the growing population of Ireland.

In his satirical work *A Tale of A Tub* Swift has made a sharp comment on the growing infighting among various religious sects making tall claims about their significant contribution for the development of society in order to trap people into their net. Swift is shocked to see the activities of these religious sects who are exhausting their energy in ensuring their superiority over other sects finding faults in one another and showing least concern over their welfare programme.

The full flowering of Swift's satirical insight is successfully reflected in his monumental work *The Battle of the Books*. Actually this battle has not been fought between the two warring factions to ensure the security of their boundary. Quite surprisingly this battle was not fought with weapons of mass destruction. The stage for the battle is set in two shelves of the King's library of England between the ancient and the modern books. In this Satire Swift has tried to ensure the superiority of ancient books over the modern books. It is an attempt to give a fitting reply to the contemporary English writers who have narrated their success story in the high flown words. But in reality they have nothing original to contribute. They have not added anything substantial to the coffer of literature and have largely borrowed the ideas from the ancient writers to whom they do not owe their allegiance. Swift has made a mark difference between the two forces whereas the ancients are led by scholars of great repute like Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Moliere the models are led by very ordinary scholars whose weapons are not sharp enough to pierce into the body of their opponents. In order to ensure the

superiority of the ancients over the modern writers Swift has taken recourse to the analogy of the spider and the bee which forms the vital part of the books. The ancients have been treated as the bee who produces honey and wax for the welfare of the suffering humanity whereas the spider on the other hand produces venom though produces out of its own effort but doesn't serve any purpose.