

Dr. Johnson as a critic (B.A. Part1 Eng Hons Paper1 2019-20)

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Dr. Johnson is the most celebrated critic of his time. His muse finds expression in his poetry as well as in criticism. He was a scholarly genius traces of which can be noticed in his critical treatise Lives of the English Poets in which he has passed his critical remarks on 52 English poets of his time. Dr. Johnson is consider as a literary dictator and it was very difficult to disagree with him. He has d compiled a lexicon of English language which speaks in volume of his critical insight and acumen.

Dr. Johnson has propounded a school of criticism which is called autobiographical school of criticism. In his critical work lives of English poets he has divided his criticism of each poet in three parts. In the first part he has discussed the life- history of the poet. In the second part the works of the poet are taken into consilation. Third part is most important section in which he has made an assessment of the merits and limitations of the poet.

Dr. Johnson has made a very scientific and systematic study of the achievement and shortcomings of the English poets. Despite this he suffers from personal bias and prejudices. He has made his evaluation with jaundiced eye. He belonged to the Augustine period. This period is marked by clarity and refinement. The Augustine society craved for norms and principles in every sphere of life. They insisted that there must be order system and balance and harmony in literature. Emphasis was paid on outward beauty of poetry. Pope has expressed the same sentiment when saying 'what often been said but not so well expressed. Poetry of this period was supposed to have well- chiselled, high- sounding

vocabulary. It is considered that poetry is a piece of art and therefore ideas are conveyed through poetry in a elegant style.

Dr. Johnson laid down the parameter or yardstick for the evaluation of a work of art. He insisted that Augustan norms and principles must be practiced in poetry otherwise it will be treated as an artistic failure Dr. Johnson as idolatrous and unyielding and was firm on his stand that ideas must be expressed in a polished and refined language. To him treatment of subject matter is more important than the subject itself. That is why he showered bucketful of praise on Pope telling that 'pope's poetry is the last word in the poetic art' and further said that 'if Pope be not a poet where can poetry be found'. This appears to be an exaggerated statement which clearly indicates his weakness for neo-classical principles. To him Pope's poetry is modelled on the same pattern.

Dr. Johnson's inclination towards neo –classical norms and principles has caused immense hardships to those showing least concern for these parameters .He has underrated Milton's poetry for want of his commitment towards classical norms of precision and refined and discarded Milton as a second rate poet which is a grave injustice to a poet to the stature of Milton and points out the loopholes in Dr, Johnson's assessment of poets in his Lives .S

Dr. Johnson has criticized Milton in his Lives saying that "the perusal of Paradise Lost is a duty rather than pleasure.' He further attacked him severely insisting that' If we take up the reading of Paradise Lost take it aside we hardly take pains to read it again'. It required the intervention of the critic to the stature of T. S .Eliot to refute his charges.

Dr. Johnson insisted that the Metaphysical poets were men of learning and their objective was to show their scholarship. They craved for far-fetched imagination and yoked their ideas by violence together in their poetry.

