

Dr. Johnson as a critic

Page No.:

Date:

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BA Part I, English Hons
Paper I, 2019-20

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Dr. Johnson was the leading critic of 18th Century. His criticism veered around Augustan norms and principles. He craved for polish, refinement, precision, system, and harmony in poetry. He was more concerned with external beautification of poetry. He took it as a parameter for the evaluation of a work of art. He viewed poetry with a jaundiced eye and gave more credibility to those showing strong affinity with Augustan norms and principles. He was a literary dictator and it was very difficult to disagree with him.

The critical formulations of Dr. Johnson find expression in Dr. Johnson's book *Lives of the English Poets* in which he has made a critical evaluation of 52 English poets. He laid the foundation of autobiographical criticism who he has

has followed in his hives. He has evaluated a given poet in three different ways. At first, he has presented the autobiographical records of the poet. In the second part the works of the given poet is taken into consideration. Finally the assessment of the poet has been made in the last part.

Dr. Johnson's preoccupation with the Augustan norms and principles have caused a great harm to those showing least concern with these ideologies. That's way poets like Milton and Gray were forced to the background by Dr. Johnson whereas he has showered bucketful of praises on the poetry of Pope for his deep association with Augustan norms which Dr. Johnson craved for in poetry.

Dr. Johnson's craving for Augustan ideologies have posed a great threat to the poetry of Milton which no longer felt in line with Augustan approach. He strongly opposed Milton's use of Latinized diction and elliptical expressions which no longer suited to the demand of poetry which Dr. Johnson looked into.

Thus he made a harsh criticism of Paradise Lost in his Lives of Milton saying that 'the perusal of Paradise Lost is a duty rather than pleasure'. He further insists that 'if we take up a reading of Paradise Lost and leave it aside for a period we seldom take care of reading it again'. He did not notice poetic excellence in Paradise Lost. For him it a religious work which is badly wanting in artistic grandeur.

Dr. Johnson on the contrary praised the poetry of Alexander Pope in high flown words. He says, in the ~~Lives~~ Life of Pope, Pope's poetry is the last word in poetic art. He has further added, 'if Pope be not a poet where can poetry be found.' It clearly indicates his prejudice towards the poetry of Pope. Thomas Wray too was made victim to the harsh remarks of Dr. Johnson. Milton's credibility as a poet was on the wane and it was revived by Eliot in 20th century.

In his Life of Collins, Dr. Johnson has evaluated the poetry of 17th century metaphysical poets led by John Donne. He called them metaphysical poets because they were men of learning and to display their Scholarship was their objective they yoked the ideas by ^{violence} together.