

Jacobean Drama

B A part - 1 (English Honours)

Paper 1, Unit C - History of English Drama

Jacobean Drama was a dark form drama in English literature. It was a period of James 1 (1603- 1625), was also known as Jacobean Theatre. Although Shakespeare was still writing major works until around 1611, the leading dramatist of this Jacobean period was Ben Jonson. Another noted Jacobean playwright included John Marston, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Heywood, John Ford, Thomas Dekker, Cyril Tourneur and Samuel Rowley.

In comedy, the Elizabethan concern with characterization and romantic love began to give way to a vague for harsh satire and increased realism from about 1610. Jacobean tragedy shows a similar obsession with the idea of moral corruption; examples include Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* 1619, as well as Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* 1610. The plays which are horrifically violent, display a generally cynical and pessimistic outlook on life. From 1605 Jonson collaborated with Inigo Jones to create the extravagant and scholarly court masques beloved by James 1 and his queen.

Jacobean drama was a period of a very short time in English literature which was not very popular and also not received enough appreciation as Elizabethan dramas had gained. That's why the existence of Jacobean drama was vanished very quickly from the context of English literature.

The Elizabethan age was the golden age of English drama. But with the turn of the century, the drama in English also took a turn. It does not mean that there were no dramatists left. There were certainly a large number of them, but none of them could come near Shakespeare.

In the Elizabethan period, drama was patronised by the feudal lords, but from the time of the accession of James 1, dramatists totally depend on the king, the queen and the royal domination. The dramatists wholly depend on the royal favour. In this way, the theatre was cut off from common life and no longer remained a national institution as it was in the time of Shakespeare.

The dramatists of the Jacobean period cared less for men in the street and women in the kitchen. They delighted the court and king. After Shakespeare, there was no other dramatist who could fill his space which naturally marked the decline of the Jacobean drama. The art of characterization was poor in the drama of Jacobean playwrights. The dramatist repeated such characters as the cheats, bullies, gamblers in

stead of Shakespeare's immortal characters like heroes, heroines, villains and clowns.

Jacobean dramatist also lacked in dramatic technique in his drama. The dramatist could not maintain Marlow's '*mighty line*' that is known as blank verse. In the art of plot- construction, with the exception of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* and *The White Devil* of Webster, we find the sign of decline. Too often plot- construction shows careless in details and want of coherence. There are effective episodes but not structural growth. The Shakespearian always laid emphasis on the balance between romance and realism which has been poorly replaced either by narrow social activities or by romantic excess.

The puritan opposition to the drama is also responsible for the decline of drama during this age. Ever since the drama became popular in England, the puritan waged a war against it. They regarded drama and all forms of entertainment as the devil's work that may corrupt the moral and ethical values of men and women, and all these sources of amusements must be avoided by men and women. Thus, after the death of William Shakespeare, the drama became to show signs of decline in morals, plot construction, characterization and technique.

Thus, we can say that Jacobean dramas have not received so much appreciation but the dramatists of this age have shown their talents and

skills to form a new kind of drama which was based on the concern of royal dignity and its supremacy.

This period is also known as a barren period in dramatic literature. In this period two plays are very famous the white devil and the duchess of malfi by Webster. Both his tragedies are based on the revenge motif. In them he emerges as a painstaking artist who had in them refined the material and motifs of the earlier tragedies of blood and gloom, wrought all that he took into something richer and something much more subtly beautiful. He had in a word, converted melodrama into tragedy. He imparted moral vision, psychological subtlety and emotional depth to the tragedy of revenge and horror.

There are some Plays of the Jacobean period as follows: -

The Shadow of Night by George Chapman

Every Man in his Humour by Ben Jonson

A Woman Killed with Kindness by Thomas Heywood

The Shoemaker's Holiday by Thomas Dekker

The Malcontent by John Marston

A Game at Chess by Thomas Middleton

A New Way to Pay Old Debts by Philip Massinger

The Broken Heart by John Ford

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