

Jonathan swift as a satirist

Swift occupies an eminent place among the greatest satirist of English literature. The last quarter of the seventeenth century and first half of the 18th century in English literature was the golden age in England. It was an age of excessive material pursuit and external elegance in manners. This was an age of spiritual void in which emphasis was shifted from the essence to the external, from the spiritual to material pursuit. This created a void between the ideal and the actual. Swift wrote his satire under such circumstances.

For long, Swift had suffered on account of a wrong approach to his satire. It has been criticized for its corrosive quality and pessimistic tone. In all his satires, man appears as an irrational, selfish, and perverted creature, ridden with all sorts of vice. Traditional critics like Thackeray and Scott concluded that Swift was a born misanthrope and that his personal failures in love, in church, in politics must have embittered him to such an extent as to cause him to see in human life nothing but filth and corruption. Monrey, averred that key to Swift's satire lay in his sexual difficulties with Stella. But modern critics have different view and call Swift's satire powerful specimen of his age. According to them, his satire should not be taken as a projection of a diseased mind. His satires are to be considered as an emanation of a mind nurtured on the Neo-classical ideals of good sense and reason and intensely sensitive to pretension and hypocrisy, in whatever form and field they were to be found. He views man's activity and thought in the terms of the doctrine of common sense.

Swift is often abused as misanthrope. He hated mankind and presents man as a loathsome creature incapable of improvement and ridden with all sorts of corruption. He takes a very dim and pessimistic view of life in the real sense of the term. But this is not because he was a man-hater. As an Anglican clergyman, Swift believed in the doctrine of original sin. Man fell from his state of perfection as soon as Eve disobeying God took the forbidden fruit. Therefore, man is not born perfect. He may attain to a better state by following divine precepts. But experience shows that man, instead of improving his faculties, allows himself to be swayed by pride, selfishness, avarice, lust and other vices. He wars, he fights, he indulges in deceit, hypocrisy and violence. What hope can there be for man's salvation. To Swift, human history is not a record of human progress, but of human degeneration. However, it must be remembered that Swift's purpose was to satirize man in order to awaken the English society to its ills and corruption which flourished beneath the outward surface of decency.

Swift's satire is not motivated by a ~~stiff~~ spite of mankind nor does it grow out of personal malice. It is calculated to call attention to the many evils and he wants to eradicate all these evils. But when we observe minutely, we find that Swift's satire degenerates into mere invective and one may notice instances of lampooning while satire proper is condemnation of folly and vice by reference to some moral point. Invective and lampoon are motivated by mere personal bitterness. Addison and

and Steele laughed gently at the foibles of their fellow men and tried to correct them by showing how ridiculous their small weakness looked. Swift, on the other hand, was a hardcore satirist and satire for him was not laughing matter. Sin and folly did not amuse him. They invited his anger. Besides, his satire was highly intellectual and

He distasted the emotional particular enthusiasm of all types. With his sharp vision, he saw the physical, intellectual and moral diseases of mankind. He invited his anger and start exposing each of them. He dissected human nature to bite.

Swift's satire was directed against a few persons and several institutions. Swift did not indulge much in personal satire. Most of his satire is directed against human beings in general and their political, social and religious institutions. Most of his satire is impersonal as it is directed against human nature as a whole.

In *Gulliver's Travels* he attacks human nature as a whole. But we find lovable characters too. The main trend of his satire was negative. He was more interested in destroying evil than in glorifying virtue. But Swift kept a positive ideal in front of him in writing *Gulliver's Travels*; it was to mend the world. It is very strange to note that in spite of the universal condemnation of mankind, *Gulliver's Travels* remains a popular work. That is because nobody is hurt when everybody is condemned.