

# Addison as a social reformer

M.A.2nd SEM English Literature

Saints burry refers to the age of Addison as **the peace of the Augustans**. It was in reality an era of tensions, tensions between the puritans and the courtly upper classes, and fierce political and civil strife. **Unity and sanity** were the urgent need of the hour and it was the mission of the Addison as a social reformer to bring about this sanity, the much needed order out of disorder, peace and harmony out of social strife. Court hope rightly calls Addison a **great conciliator** and David Daiches justly calls him **a mediator between town and country, between landed gentry and prosperous citizens**. It was the weapon of light ridicule against all aberrations from good breeding and commonsense that Addison used-

1. To restore sanity
2. To reconcile parties
3. To found a sound public opinion and standard of judgment

It has been well establish that Addison and Steele aimed at social and moral reformation of the society in which they lived and moved. Addison avowed purpose and writing for the spectator was moral and ethical. But he also wanted to divert or amuse his readers. Addison so planned his essays as **to make their instruction. Agreeable and their diversion useful to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality**. He tried to proof that there was much good both in the puritan and the gentleman. He showed the courtiers, in a form of light literature which pleased their imagination, and with a grace and charm

of manner that they were well qualified to appreciate, that true religion was not opposed to good breeding.

The refined upper classes were immoral, while the virtuous middle classes under puritan influence were fanatical. **The puritans apposed all amusement as immoral and every gentle person for them was a veritable devil the very embodiment of immorality.**

Although Addison, in writing for the famous periodical which had been started by Steele called himself early a spectator, yet his real object was to play the role of a critic of the life and manners of his times. He set out to be a mild censor of the morals of the age and most of his compositions deal with topical subjects- fashions, head-dresses, practical jokes, indecency in conversation, gambling, drinking, swearing, cruelty, dwelling etc. he attacked the trivialities of life, and the follies and foibles of dress, of manners, or of thought. His aim in his own words was to point out those vices which **are too trivial for the chastiment of the law, and too fantastical for the cognizance of the pulpit.** He was, therefore, an avowed social reformer but he had no desire to denounce or castigate the fools and the vicious people.

The very plan of the spectator club is intended to present to the readers a cross- section of English society. Every member of the club is a representative of a profession or trade or class of society. Thus sir roger, a typical country squire of the old feudal order, represents country life, the Templers represents the legal, art and learning, captain sentry, the military. The spectator himself is an impartial observer of men and manners and he sees and records practically every aspect of life of the times.

The essay in the spectator covers a wide diversity of subjects. They are a faithful reflection of the life of the time viewed with an aloof and dispassionate observation. Addison stated his essentially moral intension when he declared his purpose of bringing philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables in coffee-houses.

It is chiefly through the character of Sir Roger that country life and country manners have been portrayed. In the old ideas of feudalism still persist. Through such papers as Sir Roger at home, SIR Roger at church, moll white every aspect of country life has been vividly represented. Many old ways of thinking still survive.

One important social aspect of the spectator was the attention it paid to women. Its editors wished to stress the fait that they were writing for women as well as men and that women must play a large paint in the process of civilizing, which the editors were striving to promote. **There are none to home; this paper will be more useful than to the female world, wrote Addison to the interest of the fair sex. Became one of the invariable convention of the periodical essay and there can be little doubt that the essays did much to improve the status and education of women. Here Steele is a better moralist than his collaborator.**

Similarly he harmonized the code of wit and pleasure with that of virtue and religion, in the realm of art and literature. His penetrating wit, founded on truth and reason, was appreciated by the fashionable world. In all these aspects Addison is **the voice of humanized Puritanism, the voice of a new and civilized urban life.** He emphasized virtue but never went to the extreme of condemning all pleasure.

A similarly humanizing or civilizing role did Addison play in the realm of politics as well. He thus made a useful plea for moderation and tolerance for more civilized and human standards of conduct. Addison did not fail to exert a humanizing influence on the fierceness of party violence in his day.

The spectator is important also in so far as it established the essays as an honored of literature. At least in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it became the dominant form. The spectator is important, next, as marking a definite stage in the evolution of the English novel. The essay series dealing with sir roger **brings us with in measurable distance of the genuine 18<sup>th</sup> century novel. Finally, the spectator did a great service to English prose. It represents in this matter the indispensable 18<sup>th</sup> century.** It was Addison who more than anyone else, invented, **middle style something between the grave stately diction of formal writing and the free and easy speech of everyday, a style suited therefore, for addressing a wide circle of readers on a wide varieties of subject, un pretentious admirably clear dignified but never stilled**

Mr. Spectator and sir. Roger exchange visits and in this way the good and the admirable, as well as the eccentric and the frivolous, both in the town and the country are revealed. Thus the important of the work cannot be exaggerated. He laid down rational standards of conduct and formed sound public opinion.

# RABINDRANATH TAGORE AS A MYSTIC POET

B.A. final year

English Literature

“There are some who have speechless for ages in any shadow. Let me utter their songs.....

Make me their poet, on night, the poet of Thy fathomless silence. “

As a poet Rabindranath Tagore set for himself a definite objective. His main aim in his poetry was to sing about the tremendous mystical experience of the sages because of the unique similarity between the sensibilities of the ancient sages and those of the poet who acknowledges that “in the depth of my unconsciousness sings the cry I want thee, only thee.”

Tagore is a pure poet and not a theorist who would formulate a rigid system to describe his mystical experiences that have for him a great ‘emotive’ value. He blends the tenets of the old and the new schools of the oriental and western philosophies in such a fashion that his utterances-these manifest his electric vision-finally remain the representation of his own ‘state of consciousness.’ The very first line of Gitanjali, “thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure,” reveals two important things that there I am infinite power which has a perennial desire of making the finite and that there is an urge of self-exceeding, a sense of becoming something ‘more’ by involving inwardly.

Mysticism’s genuine strength is the strength of its psychology in the original sense of the world that is, “auto logy, the science of self.” Tagore’s poetry turns out to be a genuine representation of the mystical values. It is the discovery of “thou” that the poet finds his own identity:

**My eyes strayed far and wide before I/shut**

**Them and said, “hear art thou”**

**The question and the cry, “oh where?” melt**

**Into tears of thousands streams and deluge**

**The world with the flood streams of the assurance**

**"I am!"**

To comprehend the essence of Tagore's poetry, let us analyse in detail its progression through the four phrases of the mystical quest as underbill proposed.

- (1) **The awakening of the self-** The first and the foremost stage is the "awakening for the self". It occurs when the poet feels the mystical presence around him that makes him uneasy: "I know not what this is that stirs in me, -I know/not its meaning." The experience, so overpowering and new, confirms that the orthodox ways of "worshipping God in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut" will lead him nowhere. He urges his fellow beings also to meet him "where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking the stones." The new knowledge of the unity in all things, including the opposites like day and night, spring and autumn, life and death, finite and infinite, fills him with joy.

Tagore reaches the mystical consciousness through the transfigured senses of taste, sound, odour, touch and sight, and celebrates the knowledge gained through them in his poetry:

**"He it is, the innermost one, who awakens  
My being with his deep hidden touches."**

- (2) **The purification of the self-** The poet accepts all the humble and the great- with equal warmth. The intuitive knowledge of the intrinsic structure of the universe dispels all doubts and delusions, and removes distinctions between the degraded and the ennobled. In other words, through his belief that "seeing, hearing and feeling are miracles as such as are faculties of the soul," he grows more receptive towards the world and acquires the virtue of 'desired humility.'
- (3) **The divine reality-** To meet "life within me" he enters into another stage of his 'mystic way' that is termed "illumination" by underbill

which bursts forth with the “knowledge of reality.....the divine reality”. Now “the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things, and is often convinced that it knows the secret of the worlds.” A large number of Tagore’s songs imbibe the ecstasy of illumination, for instance consider song XLVI of Gitanjali:

**I know not why today my life is all astir,  
And a feeling of tremulous joy is passing  
Through my heart.  
It is as if the time were come to wind up  
My work and I feel in the air a faint  
Smell of thy sweet presence.**

(4) **The transcendental knowledge-** That is the knowledge of the inwardness of things-makes “life and death” the play of the same endless music. It opens the floodgates of hope and love that impart abundant faith. And together they hold the promise of the infinite possibilities of the union with “the great unknown” that is the final destination of all the mystics of all schools of thought when Tagore reaches this stage of his mystical experiences, his poetry shares the harmony and music that throbs at the heart of nature and the universe. Like most of the mystics Tagore believes that union could take place in two ways: first, through love and faith and second, through perception.

When the poet emerges out of these mystical experiences, he confronts a strange and compelling problem. How to transcribe these untranslatable experience in language? How to convey its significance in words? After his frenzied search for words, he arrives at the realization that he that is without ‘name’ cannot be defined by the words from a dictionary, so the song of ‘thee’ has to be free from the bondage of words. In his nervous excitement-a stage which is essential by the mystic he says:

**I boasted among men that I had known you. They see your pictures in all works of mine. They come and ask me, “Who is he? I know not how to answer them. I say, “indeed, I cannot tell.” They blame me and they go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.**

Tagore bows down in “silent salutation to thee” comprehending distinctly that “from the words of the poet men take what meanings/please them, yet their last meaning points to thee.”

**-Dr. Rajani Singh**