

JOHN MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

BOOK-1

(A Detailed Textual Study)

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PREFACE

Paradise Lost is an epic, dealing with a lofty theme based on the Biblical story of the Fall of Man from Heaven because of Eve's transgression of the command of God not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Satan deceived Eve disguised as a serpent and God punished him for the act of sin and transformed him into a hellish snake. Sin and punishment are also associated with the theme of the epic. Sin follows punishment, and repentance washes away the sinner's sin. Adam repented for his sin and so Christ redeemed him from sin and gave him back Heaven.

God is presented as an Omnipotent power. He symbolizes virtue, and is opposed to Satan who is an embodiment of evil. God loves and pardons; Satan hates, destroys and aims at thwarting the purposes of God. God is the dispenser of justice, which Milton seeks to vindicate. Though Satan is endowed with heroic qualities, we cannot support his immortality and unethicality. The conflict between God and Satan is representative of the eternal conflict between of the good and the evil in the world. The epic upholds the basic moral law and value. It is the product of Milton's puritanic view of life and Renaissance mind.

Milton is a great poet with his great poetic genius. He has been a poet of timelessness. He is endowed with rare creative imagination and wonderful power of descriptive art which deserves great appreciation. He has been criticised as corrupting the English language and his similes have been characterised as superfluous, but his language is scholarly and bold and is in consistence with the sublime theme of the epic. His similes are graphic and decorative, and have become the integral part of the epic. His style is grand and is characterized by the Dorian grace.

This volume is a critique of Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book I. In this volume I have elaborately discussed the major aspects of Milton as a poet as well as a conscientious artist. I have restricted my discussion mainly to Book I of the epic. The chapters that precede the text is a compendium of the age of Milton, his works, and the detailed textual analysis. The text is carefully paraphrased, summarized and annotated. The thematic analysis of the text would give a clear idea about the text to those for whom the vol-

ume is primarily intended. Important lines have been interpreted and explained so that the text is easily understood. Important topics associated with this text which have been carefully discussed are appended to this volume.

The manuscripts of the volume has been gone through by some experienced teachers who have highly praised and appreciated it. I am greatly grateful to them. I am grateful to Madhabi Pandey, my wife who had gone through the chapters of the volume and corrected the errors which were merely the ship of the pen. Sri Balai Mukherjee and Sri Kausik Mukherjee of Graphics-O-Point, Malda deserve high admiration for composing the manuscript artistically. Sujit Kumar Mishra deserves special credit for his sincere effort in setting the pages rightly. Amit Saha, Kolkata, is credited with giving a final shape to the book. I am ever grateful to Shri Sandeep Nayak, the sole guardian of *Grantha Tirtha*, who brought the book out. I am confident of the high merit of the volume.

October, 2004

Dr. Kalyan Pandey

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I. THE AGE OF MILTON

The age of Milton was a very complex and decisive age in the history of England. It marks the end of the Age of the Renaissance. It was an age of remarkable paradoxes¹ and contradictions was full of the political and religious strife of the reign of Charles I. The literature of the age presents a marked difference from the literature of the Elizabethan age. The great conceptions — philosophical, political and social — that had characterized the preceding² age gave way and disappeared. England was steadily transforming itself from the medieval ideals to the modern ideals. In the economic field, rural economy was gradually turning into urban economy. In politics democratic ideals of human liberty and equality were gradually replacing the age-old doctrine of the divinity of the King. In religion too Roman Catholicism was gradually yielding to Protestantism³ and Puritanism. The age marked the triumph of Puritanism. The English sovereign was receding into the background, and Parliament was coming into prominence by remarkably quick strides. England in Milton's age was labouring through such a situation to transition in all national and social spheres. The spirit of Renaissance was almost over and there was a marked change in temperament and outlook.

The age of Milton was governed by two aspects that influenced the life of people and literature of the age. These are the political and the religious aspects. Men like Pym and Hampden laid emphasis on the legal claims of King Charles I who was executed⁴. Cromwell and Milton who were inspired by moral and social ideals represented the religious aspect of the age. The puritans under Cromwell deeply believed in the supremacy of God as the ruler of rulers and in the sanctity of individual conscience. Thus Puritans became a political as well as a moral and religious force and the great champion of the endangered freedom of the English people. The growth of the puritanism which characterized the age had important consequences for the literary life of the nation.

The literature of the Elizabethan age stands distinguished from that of the age of Milton. Elizabethan literature had a marked unity and spirit, resulting from the patriotism of all classes and their devotion to a queen. It is intensely romantic. It is generally inspiring, it throbs with youth, hope and vitality. The literature of the age of Milton is marked with a note of melancholy and spiritual certainty. It is very much different from the buoyancy and optimism of the Elizabethan age. There was a steep decline from the high Elizabethan standard. The deterioration was mostly due to the influence of Puritanism. There was a marked decay in the exalted poetical fervour of the previous age. In the new

1. statements that sound absurd, may in fact be true. 2. coming before. 3. the system of beliefs, teachings, etc. of the Protestants. 4. put to death.

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poetry there was more of the intellectual play of fancy than of passion and profundity. The rise of prose-writing paved the way for the decline in poetry. The development of prose was well-marked in this age. History, politics, philosophy and writings on diverse subjects are presented in prose. In addition, there was a remarkable advance in prose style. During the age of Milton drama declined. In temper the age was not dramatic.

The literature in this age became for the first time modern in spirit. It became modern in many ways. The Civil Wars separated men from the older ways of living. The religious controversies killed much that had remained lively in the national imagination since the Middle Ages. The blight of commercialism was setting its ugly plague upon the features of magnificence. Science and rationalism were growing in power and destroying man's capacity for myth-making. In relation to knowledge, it is the spirit of science, and the study of science which is the essential intellectual fact in modern history, dates from just this time, from Bacon, Newton and Descartes. In relation to literature, it is the spirit of criticism, and criticism in the England is the creation of the seventeenth century. The positive temper, the attitude of relation, is everywhere in the ascendant⁵. Though the age was full of the spirit of enquiry and rationalism, it was not a prosaic age. Enthusiasm burned fierce and clear in the passionate poetry of Milton, in the fanaticism of Bunyan and in the wide and vigilant curiousness of Bacon.

Puritanism exerted a deep influence on the tone, temper and thought of the literature of the age of Milton. A Puritan was God-fearing but he had unwholesome view of the world. He was not only indifferent but also hostile to science and art and the sense of beauty. The effect of Puritanism on the literature was fatal. Puritanism destroyed human culture, and sought to confine literature within the restricted field of its own peculiar interests. The form in which the age of Milton expressed itself was Puritanism. It was branded as dark, blind and hostile to literature. It did not favour literature which is mainly characterized by art, beauty and imagination. It was in such a period that the position of the poet was difficult because of the uncongenial atmosphere, but Milton emerged as a great poet and wrote the elevated poetry. In his work the moral and religious influences of puritanism are combined with the generous culture of the Renaissance. He transcended the bigotry⁶ of the age by his many-sided genius. He is antagonistic to the temper of his age, and nearer to the Elizabethans. He is rightly called a belated Elizabethan.

In literature the Puritan Age was one of confusion. Poetry took new and startling forms in John Donne and Herbert, and prose became as sombre as Puritan's Anatomy of Melancholy. The writer's of the age were obsessed with spiritual gloom which paved the way for rejection of the accepted standards in

5. rising in power and influence. 6. tendency to show that one refuses to accept the opinions of others.

John Milton

government and religion. Puritanism destroyed humane culture and narrowed the scope of literature. Puritanism proved fatal both to art and literature. But though Milton was a Puritan, his Puritanism was based on the generous culture of the Renaissance. His puritanic views of life and society as reflected in his works influenced many English poets. Milton's puritanism is rational and in *Paradise Lost* he declares his aim and object to "assert Eternal Providence / And justify the ways of God to men." He aims at vindicating God's dispensation⁷ of justice. He punishes those who commit sin and favours the virtuous. He punished Adam and Eve as they, under Satan's temptation transgressed⁸ God's command. He expelled them from Heaven. Satan seduced Eve disguised as a serpent and so God transformed him into an Infernal serpent. As a thinker and a moralist, he is a puritan, but as a poet and an artist he is a Renaissance spirit. He is a humanist, and his puritanism has not killed his humanism. He possesses a deep sense of beauty; he is ever inspired by love of learning and knowledge and the Renaissance spirit of love of liberty.

The age of Milton was rich in lyrical poetry of a peculiar kind. The theme is chiefly love or religion. The lyric poems written in this age are a charming literary exercise which is represented by the lyrics of Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling and Carew. The religious lyrics of Crashaw and Vaughan are passionately inspired and Milton's lyrics are superbly phrased. The epic and the ode were written in this age. The true epic, represented by Milton's *Paradise Lost*, deals with a sublime subject in the grand manner. In this age we observe the appearance of the Pindaric ode which was to be so popular in the succeeding generations. Cowley's *Pindarique Odes* are the first of their class in English.

Milton represents the dominant influence in the period of transition when at last the compromise or the fusion between two forces of the Renaissance and the Reformation finally broke down and came to a head-on collision. England became the centre of all literary and cultural activities. The habit of reading was wide-spread all over the country. Romances, histories, sermons, handbooks on manners and business and roadside ballads fed the popular demand. In the field of poetry the majority of the poets wrote short lyrical poems. These lyrics were either amatory⁹, marked with exquisite delicacy and fanciful and metaphysical like those of Donne and his followers. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Comus*, *Samson Agonistes* constitute the richest legacy the seventeenth century, which has left not only for England but also for the whole world. During the age of Milton we have two classes of poets — the Metaphysical poets and the Cavalier poets. Both of them have enriched English poetry by their compositions.

The lyrical style of the age shows a decline from the natural splendour of the Elizabethan age, but it shows an increase in care, in polish and in actual

7. distribution. 8. violated. 9. having to do with sexual love or desire.

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metrical dexterity¹⁰. The lyric of Carew illustrates the felicity¹¹ both of sound and of expression. In Milton the style reaches a magnificent climax. He employed rhymed verse for his early poems. His early poems, *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, *L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* reveal his superb handling of rhymed verse.

The age of Milton was in many ways a transition into the modern world. It was a strong revolt against the older ways of living. It challenged older views of life and religion, society and politics, art and literature, morality and government, beauty and creation. It strengthened the national imagination and enriched social and cultural views and consequently exercised a humanizing influence upon the creative mind and imagination. Church and State became one. Christianity opposed Calvinism and tried to purify man's ways of the acquisition of wealth. Moral crimes were severely punished. The Old Testament became the book of the law. A new way of life, which was foreign to the English character was imposed. The English character underwent a change. New social, religious and literary forces evolved. Those forces transformed Milton's thoughts. He chose such themes for his works as will teach man moral and ethical lessons, and make him rational. This age thus brings about change in the creative flow of literature.

The age of Milton, which marked a social, political and cultural change, exercised a new and strong literary influence upon the succeeding writers. It widened the scope of theme for literature, and it was clearly seen that English literature was greatly enriched with the introduction of the elements of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

10. neat skill. 11. the force of Protestantism of John Calvin (1509-1564), centring on the belief that God has decided everything that happens in advance.

II. LIFE AND WORKS OF MILTON

John Milton was born in 1608 in Bread Street, London. It was the year in which Shakespeare was writing his great romances. His grand father, Richard Milton, was an ardent Roman Catholic. He was the son of a scrivener, a man of literary and musical tastes and Protestant views. His mother was a woman of refinement and social grace with a deep interest in religion and local charities. His Latin epistles to his friend Diodate show him as a gentle and social youth, a lover of music, dancing, woman, books, plays and country pleasures. He was greatly influenced by his parents. He was also studious, religious, highminded and modest.

Milton was sent to St. Paul's School for the first phase of his education. Here he studied not merely Greek and Latin, but also Italian, French and Hebrew. It was during these school days that Milton wrote the paraphrase of psalm 136 which is used in English hymn book to the present days. In 1625 he entered Christ's College, Cambridge. He studied there for seven years. He took his B. A. in 1628 and became an M. A. in 1632. It was during these Cambridge years that he made his first experiments in poetry both in Latin and in English. The English poems written during this period bear more relevance to the student of English literature. The poems are *On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of Cough*, *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, *At a solemn Music* and *Ode on Shakespeare*. Among the fellow students he was known as 'the Lady of Christ'. They are of unequal excellence but they bespeak of the advent of a great poet.

Leaving Cambridge in 1632, he went to live at Horton in Buckinghamshire, where his father bought a house. Here he had devoted himself to study thought for twelve years. He had no contact with man's minds in the world. In 1638 he left for continental travel. During his stay at Florence, he visited a place that he was to remember twelve years later while writing *Paradise Lost* Book-I. Soon after settling at Horton he wrote *L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. His friendship with Henry Lawes, the musician, led to the composition of *Arcades* as part of an entertainment given by the family of dowager Countess of Durby at Hanenfield in 1634, and of a masque, since known as *Comus* which was the first dramatization of his great theme, the conflict between good and evil. It was in a way a song of innocence. In 1637 the death of his Cambridge acquaintance¹ Edward King occasioned the writing of *Lycidas*. In this elegy² he casually takes up to express his disgust at the corruption of the Anglican Churchmen under Laud's administration.

1. a person whom one knows slightly. 2. a mournful poem.