

UG 1st Sem. CC 2 (ENGLISH)

Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)

"FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY "

"Father of verse! who in immortal song First taught the Muse to speak the English tongue."

Geoffrey Chaucer is regarded as "the father of English Poetry " and the earliest of the great moderns. In the middle ages when the light of modernism was not yet visible on the horizon, Chaucer anticipated the modern taste and the modern mind and his poetry introduced far in advance of his times . Though Chaucer could not write a drama or a novel as know it , yet his works contain the seeds both of the modern drama and the novel. If he had lived a few years more, he would certainly have been the first dramatist and novelist just as he is " the first national poet of England".

HIS REALISM

Modern poetry is introduced by realism. The modern poet is a keen observer of the various tendencies of his times which are being exhibited by him in poetry. The modern note of realism had been sounded by Chaucer long ago in the 14th century. He made a through study of his times in its varied aspects and gave expression to its hopes and aspirations , it's fears and doubts in " The Canterbury Tales ". He reflected

his century not in fragments but as a whole. He had the innate instinct to catch within his purview the soul of his generation in all its fullness and its depth. He had the seeing eye, the retentive memory, the judgement to select, and the capacity to expound. His observations about his times are true and realistic, and they are not set forth with the vision of a dreamy allegorist. He stands in much the same relation to the life of his time as Pope does to the earlier phases of the Eighteenth Century and Tennyson to the Victorian Age. He presents a cross-section of English Life in the Fourteenth Century successfully.

HIS DESCRIPTIONS

Chaucer's best descriptions of men, manners, and places are of the first rank in their beauty, impressiveness and humour. Even when he follows the common example of his times, as when giving details of conventional spring mornings and flowery gardens, he has a vivacity that makes his poetry unique.

His power of describing his fellowmen with all their merits and demerits, their tastes and temperaments was unique and the "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales" is a picture gallery bringing in its scope all classes of people ranging from the Knight to the Miller and the Cook.

HIS NARRATIVE ART

Chaucer made notable contribution to the art of story-telling and what Morris did later in "Earthly Paradise" was achieved by him in "The Canterbury Tales". He is the supreme story-teller. He introduces humour in his narration and make his stories life like and living.

CHARACTERISATION

Chaucer made significant contribution to the art of characterisation. "Chaucer is the first great painter of character", says A.C. Ward, "because he is the first great observer of it among European Writers". He presents his characters in a masterly manner. His characters are both individuals and types. They are timeless creations on time determined stage. Every age in Canterbury pilgrimage is the pilgrimage of the world and the pilgrims the epitome of mankind. His characters like that of Shakespeare are life-like and we cannot forget them. The Knight, the Friar, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath and the Doctor of Physic are living characters and have an eternal freshness about them. Chaucer's characters, no doubt, belong to their age, but they are also of all time.

HIS HUMOUR AND PATHOS

"The humour, which steeps nearly all his poetry", says E. Albert, "has great variety; kindly and patronizing as in the case of the Clerk of Oxford; broad and semi-farcical as in the Wife of Bath; pointedly satirical as

in the Pardoner and the Summoner, or coarse , as happens in the tale of the Miller, the Reeve and the Pardoner. The prevailing feature of Chaucer's humour is its urbanity; the men of the world's kindly tolerance of the weaknesses of his erring fellow mortals".

Chaucer lays a less emphasis on pathos but it is not overlooked. In the poetry of Chaucer the sentiment is human and unforced .we have excellent examples of pathos in " The Tale of the Prioress " and " The Legend of Good women ". Chaucer's pathos is not sentimental. He exhibits sympathy for inevitable sorrow.

LOVE OF OUTDOOR LIFE

A specially charming feature of his poetry is its freshness and out of doors atmosphere. His descriptions of the country are often indeed in the conventional manner of his time, and his garden landscapes and May flower are , to some extent, things of tradition only. But he has a real love of nature and particularly of Spring and when he writes of these, as in the Prologue and the Knight's Tales the personal accent is unmissable.

CONCLUSION

Chaucer made several contribution to the English Poetry and his debt is so significant that it can never be repaid even by the most exalted the scope and the range of poetry , introduced minute observation of life around him , gave vivid and clear descriptions of the

conditions of his times, excelled in characterisation, humour , pathos, made narration an art and above all gave a new form and shape to the language and versification.

"All the Chaucerian features help to create this modern atmosphere; the shrewd and placidity humorous observation, the wide humanity , the quick aptness of phrases, the dexterous touch upon the metre, and above all the fresh and formative spirit the genius turning dross into gold."

-- E. Albert.

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