

## **History of English Literature**

**Jaipal Sharma\***

### **Abstract**

English literature refers to the study of texts around the world, written in English language. Generally, English literature refers to a wide variety of lessons, including novels, non-fiction, poetry and drama, among other forms of literature. However, literature is a contested term, as new mediums of communication provide a variety of contemporary literature. The old English literature includes literature written in old English in Anglo-Saxon England during the period of the Norman Conquest from the 7th century to 1066. These works include epic, poetry, hagiography, sermons, Bible translations, legal works, chronicles, puzzles and more. This study tries to trace the history of English literature.

**Key Words: English, Literature, History, Anglo.**

**\*Lecturer in English, Arya Senior Secondary School, Panipat.**

### **Introduction**

It is believed that the literature of every region and country serves as a social document by telling the stories of people of a certain time or historical period along with its history. English literature is spread over different periods and has in light brought many prolific writers, thinkers and poets. From Leo Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' to Gustave *Flaubert*'s 'Madame Bovary', English literature is not limited to British history, but also covers various continents such as America, Europe, Asia etc. This paper brings a brief guide to the history of English literature which provides knowledge about general time period from the discovery of its important eras to historical periods. Old English language or Anglo-Saxon is an early form of English. This is old English. It was spoken from 600 to about 1100. *Widsith* and *Beowulf* are two well known poets of the period.

The Old English Literature had difficult language. There was no rhyme in Old English poems. The story of English literature begins with the Germanic tradition of Anglo-Saxon settlers. This 8th-century epic poem is in Anglo-Saxon, now commonly described as Old English. Nevertheless, there is continuous linguistic development between the two. The most important turning from around 1100 is the development of Middle English. The French vocabulary differs from Old English after the Norman Conquest. The French and Germanic influences later compete for mainstream roles in English literature. The Anglo-Saxons left no poetic rules and explicit system. The first widely accepted theory was formulated by Eduard Sievers **Sievers** (1885). He distinguished five different periodic patterns. John C. The theory of Pope (1942), which uses musical notation to track verse patterns, has been accepted in some quarters and is hotly debated.

To begin with, the establishment of English literature can be traced mainly from the Anglo-Saxon from the 6th to the 11th century AD. During this historical period, long poems were written. Beowulf and Widsith were highly narrative poems of this early period in the history of English literature. Beowulf is regarded as the first English epic poem and some other famous works produced during Old English literature include Genesis, Exodus, The Wanderer, Wife's Lament, Husband's Message, Battle of Maldon. In addition, some famous writers of Old English literature were Cynewulf and Caedmon. The English literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobian Age is one of the great events of European culture. This period was one of immense and concentrated literary activity.

## **History of English Literature**

The development of English literature is the journey of the development of a rich array of notable compositions. The fifteenth century is generally described as the 'barren' period of English literature. Poetry written in prose dominated. Artificial cheer was a gradual transition from philosophical gloom and puritan restraint of restoration to exuberant glee and imaginative freedom of the Renaissance. Gradually, the accuracy, symmetry and regularity of the Augustan school was replaced with a romanticist belief in the power of imagination and emotion, reflecting the social problems of the complex era.

Changing a distinctive paradigm in the history of English literature, the Elizabethan Age represents a magnificent century of all periods and is also known as the Golden Age. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard have great contributions to this age. Thomas introduced the sonnets to Great Britain and the Earl of Surrey used blank poetry which was later named by iconic Elizabethan writers such as Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, John Milton to name a few. Among the various poetic works of this period, 'Totale Missalslani' is considered the first printed book. The English literature is one of the most popular majors in colleges and universities in the US, with a large number of students enrolled each year due to its diverse nature and numerous graduate opportunities.

The Golden Age brought a gallery of writers of talent and literary works to the history of English literature. It was a dynamic era which was filled with intellectual and religious revolutions and upheavals. As new humanism progressed, many important works such as Sir Thomas Hobie's Castiglione and Sir Thomas North's Plutarch took place. Edmund Spenser is another prolific name in the Golden Age, also known as the Poet. Two important figures in Old English poetry are Cynewulf and Caedmon. Cynewulf wrote religious poems and four poems, Juliana, The Fates of the Apostles, Christ and Elene and the other side Cadmon is famous for his hymns. There was no rhyme in Old English poems. English dramas have undergone major changes during the Elizabethan period.

Many writers of the romantic period emphasized emotion and imagination and looked at nature with a divine vision. The person and his or her subjective experiences and expressions of those experiences were highly valued. Many scholars saw artistic and aesthetic freedom in Romanticism in contrast to the ideals of neo-liberalism. In addition to the wealth of poetry, the romantic period depicted significant innovations in the novel, including the Gothic novel.

## **Conclusion**

English literature is one of the richest literatures in the world. It has vitality, rich diversity and continuity. As literature is a reflection of society, various changes in English society from modern times till now have put their stamp on English literature. When we study the history of English literature, we find that it has gone through

certain stages, each of which has specific characteristics. These stages can be called 'yuga' 'or' periods', which are either named after central literary figures or important rulers of England, called literary movements, or literary historians. Thus, English literature has successfully explored the social and psychological realities of the human condition at various stages of its development. Till date, English literature has continued interest and specialization in experimental techniques.

### **References:**

Sanders, Andrew. *The short Oxford history of English literature*. Published in the United States by Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 1994.

Saintsbury, George. *A short history of English literature*. Macmillan, 1916.

Daiches, David. *Critical History of English Literature*. Vol. 1. Allied Publishers, 1969.

Taine, Hippolyte. *History of English literature*. H. Holt, 1879.

Sampson, George, and Reginald Charles Churchill. *The concise Cambridge history of English literature*. Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Alexander, Michael. *A history of English literature*. Macmillan, 2000.

Hodge, Robert. *Literature as discourse: Textual strategies in English and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Albert, Edward, and James Alfred Stone. *A history of English literature*. Harrap, 1979.

Burrow, John Anthony, et al. *The Oxford illustrated history of English literature*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

Mullan, John. *Anonymity: A secret history of English literature*. Princeton University Press, 2007.