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F.Y.B.A., F.Y.B.Sc. (GE)- British Literature: 19th Century

Class Division in the 19th Century England

Queen Victoria ruled over England for a large part of the 19th century, from 1837 to 1901. For this reason, the period is often known as the **Victorian Era**. This was also a time that Britain saw tremendous economic and industrial growth due to the **Industrial Revolution**.

Aristocrats

The highest power, authority and social status holder of the 19th century England social hierarchy were the aristocrats. These people usually were not involved in any manual work since their time was very valuable. These Aristocrats include following profiles:

- The Royal Family
- Spiritual Lords
- Temporal Lords
- Great Officers of the State
 - Baronets
 - Knights
 - Country Gentlemen

Middle Class

One positive social outcome of the Industrial Revolution was the development of skilled labour, which led to the rise of a **middle class**. The middle class of the 19th century England included people who were quite wealthier than the lower class. This class further got divided into two parts depending on the social status and economical power. These two categories are as follows –

- **Upper Middle Class**– These were the people at administrative levels enjoying high authority and high social status in the society. The following profiles were included in this category:
 - Factory Owners
 - Large Scale Business Men
 - Bankers
 - Doctors
 - Lawyers
 - Engineers
 - Clergymen
- **Lower Middle Class**– These people were a step lower to the upper middle class people group.
 - Small Scale Business Men
 - Shopkeepers
 - Merchants
 - Civil Servants

Lower Class

This was the lowest social class in the 19th century England social hierarchy. This class was further sub categorized into two parts. These were as follows:

- **The Working Class**– This was the upper lower class in the hierarchy. These were unskilled men, women and children who used to do the lowest level work for the country. This included following profiles:
 - Labourer

- Factory Workers
- Seamstresses
- Miners
- Sweepers
- **The Poor** – These were the people living on the charity. They were not involved in any work.

The Writer in the 19th Century

The 19th century was a time of rapid social change brought on by the accelerated Industrial Revolution. The literary giants of the age captured this dynamic century from many angles. In poetry, novels, essays, short stories, journalism, and other genres these writers provided a varied and exciting understanding of a world in flux. Unlike never before, literature bloomed and blossomed in the **19th century Britain** as English writers went on to produce historic novels that became precedents of the future of the literary world. Unlike their predecessors, novelists, writers and authors of 19th century Britain rose from the ordinary and challenged class system, gave a real view of the deplorable state of the working class, offered us our first taste of feminist literature, and created some unforgettable characters that have immortalized British literature. The British authors took literature to an altogether new level with their masterpieces. Such has been the immense effect of the work of these novelists and writers that they have left a lasting imprint on everything from thereon. Some of the great writers of the era are- Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Walt Whitman, Thomas Hardy, Washington Irving, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry David Thoreau, Ida B. Wells, Margaret Fuller, Charles Darwin, Arthur Conan Doyle etc.

Faith and Doubt in the 19th Century

The Victorian Era was known as the “age of energy and invention; the age of doubt in faith and industry; the age of reform in politics and social class status, along with the reform of a woman’s role; the age of empire; the age of reading; and the age of self-scrutiny”. The Victorian Era was one of change and growth, which both helped and hurt society as a whole. The change and growth was seen in railway construction, a boom in factory and industry, a female Queen, scientific discoveries, and higher education for females. These factors showed advancements in several areas, but these advancements brought about many questions and concerns. Children as young as nine were working, instead of going to school, to help support their families, regular churchgoers were beginning to question their faith due to Darwinism, and women were leaving their role as caregiver to pursue an education. But, for the most part, this era was the age of prosperity and economic expansion which caused the Victorians to struggle with many questions and doubts about religion, and life as they once knew it. This doubt led to the writing of much poetry centering on the crisis of faith, which contemplates religion and science during their era.

Geologists, physicists, and other scientists started delving into religion, questioning the writings of the oldest book known to man, the Bible. This was very hard on the people of this time because science and religion had once worked hand in hand; making it seem like the world was in harmony. Now, all that they held near and dear was causing great debate. This speculation

and questioning has continued from the nineteenth century, all the way through to the twenty-first century.