

SUBJECT : ENGLISH

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TOPIC : **THE SENTIMENTAL COMEDY**

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THE SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

After the end of the Stuart rule there was a reaction in the society against the excesses of licentiousness and immoral tone of the Comedy of Manners. The reaction sought to correct the human attitude and taste by introducing an overdose of sentiment. Jeremy Collier in his pamphlet “A Short View of the Profaneness and Immortality of the English Stage” voiced the uneasiness and concerns at the grossness and vulgarity of the Comedy of Manners. It paved the way for the advent of plays full of pathetic and touching scenes which made

the spectators weep and successfully changed the air of the society .

The Sentimental Comedy was a reaction against the Comedy of Manners of the Restoration period. Comedy of Manners was characterized by light hearted fun. It made fun of holy and pious characters. Satire, ridicule and fun predominated the comedy of Manners. The Sentimental Comedy introduced characters from middle-class life characterized by virtue without even a bit of vice in them. The Sentimental Comedies aimed mainly at moral upliftment.

Steele (1672-1729) led this movement, he laid emphasis on the morality and righteousness of human nature. The movement implied a belief that the conversion of sinners was easy if only their heart were touched. This simplification of the good and evil naturally deprived the drama of its many prevalent machinations – the clash of characters, the conflict between good and evil , the complexities of human psychology. Instead, the dominance of virtue over vice was expressed through tears and sighs, and hysteric displays of the emotions at

every moment of crisis. Naturally, the plays written on these principles were only mawkish and monotonous , only teaching a moral lesson. Steele's important plays are "The Funeral", "The Lying Lover", "The Tender Husband" and "The Conscious Lover".

Colley Cibber(1671-1757) was one of the chief exponents of the Sentimental Comedy. He attacked the Restoration Comedy of Manners in his article, "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage". His plays "Love's Last Shift" and "Provoked Husband" have all the qualities of the sentimental comedy. He ignores literary quality and is preoccupied with decency and morals.

Hugh Kelley (1739-1777) wrote "False Delicacy" which proved to be a great success. His brother John Kelley's "The Married Philosopher" was a remarkable play ,attempting to render a French sentimental work into English.

Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) was another important writer who produced about thirty plays in which the simplicity of nature, virtue and charity is stressed with moral tone and pathetic touch .His remarkable plays are "The

Brothers”, “The Fashionable Lover”, “The Jew” and “The Wheel of Fortune”.
