

***The Rape of the Lock* as Social Satire / Satire on Contemporary Society**

(Part-1)

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M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (10th Edition) describes satire as “the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation.” He also argues that “Satire occurs as an incidental element within many works whose overall mode is not satiric-in a certain character or situation, or in an interpolated passage of ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or of contemporary society.” Alexander Pope was best known for his satirical poetry. About writing satiric poetry, Pope remarked that “those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous.” Pope in his writings satirizes the young girls and boys, aristocratic women and men, their free time activities, nature of husbands and wives, the professional judges and politicians of the day.

Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712/14) is a social document. It mirrors contemporary society and contains a social satire, too. The whole panorama of *The Rape of the Lock* revolves around the false standard of 18th century England. Pope clearly depicts the absurdities and the frivolities of the fashionable circle of the 18th century England. The world

of Belinda-the world of fashion is a trivial world. The whole life of Belinda is confined to sleeping, make-up, enjoyment and alluring the lords. There are no transcendental elements in her life. This life is marked by ill-nature, affectation, mischievousness, coquetry, yielding and submissive nature, fierce and unruly nature, infidelity, cheapness, meanness, trivialities and frivolities. Belinda represents all the fashion struck women, busy in such stupidities.

The gallants of the time have not been spared by Pope. Baron not only represents Peter but also typifies the aristocratic gallants of the age. Pope satirises man's nature that is always weak at beauty. Men sacrifice everything at the altar of beauty and even the most intelligent man behaves foolishly when he falls upon a victim to beauty:

“With tender *Billet-doux* he lights the Pyre,
And breathes three am'rous Sighs to raise the Fire,
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent Eyes
Soon to obtain, and long possess the Prize:”

In order to make his satire sharper and all the more effective, Pope introduces the aerial machinery, which facilitates the satire. Through this weapon, the poet throws in contrast the weaknesses of the fashionable women of that age. He satirises women who are interested in fashionable life and its pursuits and who go on exercising their evil influence even after their death. For the sake of worldly grandeur, they can bid farewell even to their chastity and honour. He satirises women of fiery, coquettish mischievous and yielding nature and gives them different names. It also provides the poet with an opportunity to satirise the class consciousness of women of 18th century England.

...To be continued in part-2...