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Sub:- English (M.A, Sem-2, CC-7, Unit-3)

Topic:- John Dryden: An Essay <sup>on</sup> of Dramatic Poesy.

1) Briefly discuss the plan and purpose of the Essay of Dramatic Poesy.

(Ans) The Essay of Dramatic Poesy was published in 1668, though it was written three years earlier when, driven out of London, by the great plague. Dryden stayed at the country-house of his father-in-law, Lord Berkshire. It is written in the form of a long dialogue amongst four persons. The four interlocutors are Crites, Lisideius, Eugenius and Neander. These are all imaginary names given to four real literary persons of his time. Crites is Sir Robert Howard who was Dryden's brother-in-law. Lisideius is Sir Charles Ridley, Eugenius is Lord Buckhurst, and Neander is Dryden himself. All these four interlocutors were real figures of great literary talents.

Dryden invents a dramatic situation to bring the four interlocutors together. The imagery is that one summer morning these four persons sat in a barge and

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sailed down in the Thames to a remote quiet corner. It was the memorable day of the victory of the British navy over the Dutch navy. All the people of England were highly excited. On that exciting day Dryden and the three other interlocutors found shelter in a small harbour and started discussing contemporary literary problems.

Though there were many literary topics to discuss, but the four interlocutors decided to discuss problems relating to drama. They proposed to discuss the comparative merits and demerits of the Greek, French and English drama. For the sake of convenience the four interlocutors demarcated their roles to produce a dramatic effect. Criticus took upon himself the task of defending the Greeks. Lisideus took up the cause of the French dramatists; Engenius spoke for the English dramatists of the last age (1600-1800). Neader or Dryden himself stood for England and liberty. The plan was that each of the four interlocutors would plead the cause of the country or age assigned to him and highlighted the good points of the drama produced therein. On the whole, therefore the discussion would bring out the comparative merits and demerits of the Greek, French and English drama.

Before taking up the discussion

on drama the four interlocutors arrive at a standard definition of drama which may form the basis and standard for their deliberations. They agree upon the following definition of drama:

"A play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subjected, for the delight and instruction of mankind."

Having decided upon this, they proceed to put forth their plea and defence one by one. Here we find the most distinctive quality of Dryden as a critic - He has a liberal outlook on literature which widened as his critical powers developed and matured. His "changing tastes and interests helped to make him responsive to different kinds of literary skill and of artistic conventions thus giving him that primary qualification of the good practical critic - the ability to read the work under consideration with full and sympathetic understanding.