

## B. A. 2<sup>nd</sup> Year (Part 2) English Honours

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### The Rape of the Lock , Alexander Pope

#### Paper 3, Unit 4

**Page1:-** *The Rape of the Lock* is a mock heroic poem written by Alexander Pope which was first published anonymously in Linton's Miscellany in 1712, May in two cantos or 334 lines . It was subsequently revised, expanded and reissued under Pope's name in 1714 on 2<sup>nd</sup> March in 5 cantos or 794 lines. The Rape of the Lock owes its origin to an actual incident that took place at Hampton Court in 1711. A young lord, called Lord Petre cut off a lock of hair hanging beside the ear of a beautiful young lady named Arabella Fermor. A very serious repercussion followed and it caused as estrangement between the families of the two young people concerned though they had a great friendship.

The poem begins with Pope identifying the work as a ' Mock Heroic'. It parodies the serious, elevated style of the classical epic poems like *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, attempting at the same time to make fun of human follies and foibles. Alexander Pope writes to Joseph Spence ,

**“ A common acquaintance and well wisher of both desired me to write a poem to make jest of it, and laugh them together again.”**

Mr. Caryll, one of the common friends of both Lord Petre and Arabella Fermor, laid the matter before the poet and asked him to allay this ill- feeling by taking the theme for a playful poem . Pope borrowed ideas and certain details from various sources like 13 th Century Italian Burlesque called '*The Rape of The Bucket*' . Tassoni's plot is concerned with the war between two faction of citizens over the theft

of a bucket that has mock heroically presented as a grand and sublime

**Page2:-** object . After its first publication unpleasant consequences followed. Sir George Browne presented as Sir Plume, Belinda's uncle, in a satirical portrait in the poem , was seriously offended and threatened to hurt the poet physically. The second version is contained the marvellous supernatural machinery of sylphs , the game of ombre was inserted and also the picture of the cave of spleen. The poem grew from an amusing sketch to an epic on a small scale.

Following the Restoration, in 1660 , of the Stuart King, Charles 2, to the throne of England the manners of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century society became quite coarse, politics, scandalously corrupt and the general tone of society brutal. But people grew sick of the outrageous licence of the fashionable circles and the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a resolute attempt in the direction of moral generation.. The canto opens in the mock epic manner with an invocation to the Muse. The poet seeks the blessings of the Muse and Belinda who may accept this poem. The supernatural machinery plays an effective part in the story. Ariel , the Gurdian sylph warns Belinda about the coming misfortunes. There are different spirits like Salamanders, Gnomes, Ariel, Sylphs. The spirit of the satire runs through this second canto. The Baron prays to the God. Ariel assigns duties to each spirit. The irony is revealed that the chief pre- occupations of the ladies of that time was their beauty and love affairs. In the Third Canto, we find the picture of the Hampton Court .

Belinda wins the game of Ombre. Baron borrowed a pair of scissors from Clarissa and cuts the locks of hair.

**“ The meeting points the sacred Hair dissever,  
From the fair Head, for ever, and for ever. “**

The Baron feels triumphant. Alexander Pope describes the wonders of steel which destroys empires and the arts of the young ladies. In Canto 4 Gnome Umbriel rushed to the cave of spleen and brought a bag full of sighs, sorrows. In the final Canto 5 Clarissa advised and consoled Belinda that she need not bother about the loss of hair. Beauty does not last long .

**Page3:-** “ Good sense of a woman can capture the heart of a man for all time. “

Belinda shouted for the return of the locks of hair. But it was nowhere to be found. The Muse of Poetry took it to the sky where it shines now as a star. Thus, wit, fancy, satire, combining together in a harmonious form and design make *The Rape of the Lock* as an immortal literary piece of Alexander Pope.

## **Assignments 5x4 = 20**

- 1. Bring out the significance of the Toilet Scene of Belinda.**
- 2. What is Diana's Law? What are the different types of Spirit we find in *The Rape of The Lock* and why they are called so?**
- 3. “What dire offence ..... I sing This Verse to Caryll, Muse! Is due” –Explain.**
- 4. What type of a poem is Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*? When was the poem published?**

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