

I B.A. English

Semester – II

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Unit –II Prose

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The Royal Exchange

- Joseph Addison

Joseph Addison was an English essayist, poet, playwright and politician. It is mostly as an essayist that Addison is remembered today. He founded *The Spectator* magazine with his long - standing friend Richard Steele. During the eighteenth century the periodical *The Spectator* joined its relationship into a union of collective thoughts with the ability to influence the political, social and financial world around. The journal lends to our understanding of daily English life on many levels.

In the periodical *The Spectator* No. 69, entitled *The Royal Exchange*, Joseph Addison creates a persona that reveals a new diverse society of merchants who created the Royal Exchange and who rivalled the powers of Parliament and past Monarchies over the British domains.

The Royal Exchange, in the heart of the city (financial district) of London was not only a hub for business and shopping but also a symbol of “globalization” : the increasing importance of international commerce to the British economy. Addison’s idyllic picture of the exchange written in 1711, celebrates the way in which the whole world seems to revolve around the blessings of trade. But many English people also worried that foreign luxuries might sap the national spirit of independence and self - sufficiency.

The persona Mr. Spectator declares that he is being completely captivated by the “mixing of several ministers of commerce” with the ability to communicate and create incredible financial transactions in the multi - national melting pot through Great Britain. Mr. Addison’s persona relates how vast the wealth of merchants is, that influenced the livelihood of Britain. The persona further implies that these powerful merchants create more financial wealth than the royal treasury controlled by “Old Kings”.

Additionally Mr. Spectator speaks of Great Britain’s fragile state with nature because the climate and soil are not conducive for the production of many natural products. The persona states that nature furnishes just the “bare necessities” in Great Britain and that most commodities of “richness” are supplied through the commerce created by the Exchange. This is a powerful statement that has great influence on the readers. The merchants and common man’s desires include financial success and consumption of all the wonderful products that abound throughout the world, and should be enjoyed through the fruition of the Exchange.

Addison describes himself as a “citizen of the world”, besides explaining the advantage of trade between nations. Addison creates a link between the natural world and the international communication, implying that nature seems to have spread its “gift” to create connections and bonds between countries. The writer also picks up on how each country seems to bring its own unique produce to the Exchange. France is referred to as ‘Our Potters’. Addison shows that England is somewhat dependent on other countries for produce and he even goes as far as referring to England as “barren”.

Addison’s account of the Royal Exchange is somewhat humorous in parts. The writer picks up on the idea that England as a nation is lucky as it does not have to deal with the extreme climates, yet at the same time is able to reap the rewards from other countries who grow their produce within these conditions.

The Royal Exchange describes the new power of the London Stock market in order to draw power away from the Dutch. The English basically wanted to appear

more rich and diverse. The line "The food often grows in one country and the sauce in the other" shows us how England wanted to be at once English and universal at the same time. Certain passages of the essay show how tightly knit economy and politics were during Addison's time and they also present the love for imperialism and colonialism. Though the essay inspires national pride and propagandistic intentions, it also tries to stimulate commerce and trade.

Thus Addison glorifies consumerism and trade through the essay. He describes a kind of collective consciousness, of all countries and peoples, also of material goods, working to compete with each other, imparting value.
