

## CHAPTER 5

# MODERN ENGLISH

The English from 15<sup>th</sup> Century till now is called Modern English. It is now practical to divide this period into Modern English I and II, for the simple reason that social, technological and political developments in and outside England in the last 500 years have affected the structure and the use of English. But its basic nature has not altered much. It is interesting to chart the course of this language over the years and understand how it has established itself in the world as an international link language and a power house of literary activity. Today English occupies an enviable position as the official language in all world forums, such as the UNO and all its subsidiary units'. WHO, IMF, SAARC, ILO etc. are all using English. In India too, we are greatly dependent on English for official, social and commercial purposes. Globalization has further strengthened the requirement of learning and using English for everyday activities. The Indians are quick learners of the language because, as discussed earlier, we belong to the same Indo-European family. English is being taught and learnt with all seriousness in countries such as China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia. The Indian advantage of knowing, speaking and writing correct English will gradually disappear if the future generations of young Indians do not seriously take up the challenging task of mastering a world language.

The development of Modern English (I) was largely helped by the introduction of the printing technology in 1476. This established standard forms of English spelling and pronunciation. It also allowed opportunities to more people to write and gave wider circulation to their writings. This was facilitated by the rise of literacy in England and by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the reading public had grown considerably. Other major factors contributing to the growth of the language were the development of England as a maritime power, the expansion of the British Empire and the growth of commerce, industry and communication. Two major well known events in Europe, namely the Renaissance and the Reformation had far reaching effects on the English language.

## VOCABULARY

It can well be understood that the rapid rate of change, growth and development made the English realize that their vocabulary lacked the words to express these new ideas and

techniques. Thus began another phase of rapid borrowing from Latin, French, Greek, Italian Spanish and other languages. English absorbed words from almost fifty different languages including words from the languages of Asia and Africa. Some of these borrowings are given below. However, it is important to remember that there was a group which objected to this process and they came to be known as the Purists, but they were unable to stop the inflow of foreign words into the English vocabulary.

### SOME OF THE BORROWINGS IN THE 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

| LANGUAGE    | WORDS                                            |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| LATIN/GREEK | adapt, appropriate, capsule, lunar, virus        |
| FRENCH      | alloy, battery, chocolate, passport, ticket      |
| HINDI       | guru, pundit, sepoy, sari, thug                  |
| ARABIC      | sultan, sheikh, algebra hashish                  |
| ITALIAN     | balcony, ballot, sonnet, lottery, fuse, macaroni |
| PORTUGUESE  | buffalo, verandah, marmalade, pagoda             |
| PERSIAN     | bazaar, caravan, sofa, shah, divan, kismet       |
| SPANISH     | banana, cockroach, guitar, potato, barricade     |
| DUTCH       | knapsack, landscape, frolic, slim, easle         |
| TURKISH     | coffee, kiosk, yoghurt, caftan                   |
| AFRIKAANS   | trek, apartheid                                  |

### GRAMMAR

A significant fact to remember is that while the vocabulary of early Modern English underwent rapid changes, the grammar remained fairly conservative. The grammar of this phase is marked more by survival of certain usages and features than by the introduction of new forms. The development of grammar was taking place in ways which did not affect the basic structure of the language. Therefore, readers can read and interpret texts of this period without much difficulty.

## WELL-KNOWN LITERARY WORKS OF THIS PERIOD

| AUTHOR              | WORK                                                         |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| EDMOND SPENSER      | Farie Queen                                                  |
| CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE | Dr. Faustus                                                  |
| FRANCIS BACON       | Essays                                                       |
| BEN JONSON          | Volpone                                                      |
| SHAKESPEARE         | King Lear, Othello, Macbeth,<br>The Merchant of Venice, etc. |

The Authorized Version of the Bible and Shakespeare's writings also helped in simplifying English. The above writers of the famous Elizabethan age with their literary genius transformed the language and brought about unprecedented creativity and inventiveness in its use.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century also known as the Augustan Age, there is a strong sense of order and regulation, in sharp contrast to the spirit of experiment and adventure of the previous two centuries. The needs of a Dictionary and Grammar was felt greatly during this period, so that spellings could be standardized and correct use of grammar would become possible. The often heard idiom – "Necessity is the mother of Invention" proved to be correct. In 1755 Dr. Samuel Johnson published A DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, which contained over 40,000 words and their meanings. The work took seven years to complete.

The second need was fulfilled by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century grammarians. Some of these Grammar books were:-

1. William Loughton (1734) — Practical Grammar of the English Tongue
2. Joseph Priestly (1761) — The Rudiments of English Grammar
3. Robert Lowth (1762) — Short Introduction to English Grammar
4. James Buchanan (1762) — The British Grammar
5. Lindley Murray (1792) — English Grammar

These grammars had three main objectives: first, to codify the rules of English sentence structure; second, to discuss points and decide cases of divided usage and finally, to prescribe rules for correct usage. The foundations of English were strengthened by these

methods. Many of the conventions now accepted in present day grammar were originally stated in these books.

## CONCLUSION

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century grammarians shared the spirit of the Age to establish order in language, after what they saw a chaotic period of expansion and experiment. They felt that grammar could be a means of preserving the language and considered their roles as authoritative but there existed differences of opinion among writers and grammarians.

This story about the changes, growth and development of English largely took place within the area called the British Isles. After the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the English language started leaving the shores of England. It travelled to almost all parts of the world and was soon to become a world Language. Many socio-political events were responsible for this. This the beginning of Modern English II. The expansion and diversification of English in the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries is discussed in the next chapter.

## EXERCISES

### 1. Complete the statements given below:

- English absorbed words from almost ..... different languages.
- ..... objected to the inflow of the foreign words in English.
- The two works that helped in simplifying English are.....
- ..... published ..... in 1755.

### 2. Answer these questions very briefly:

- Why are the Indians quick learners of English?
- What realisation led to the borrowings from different languages?
- What were the three objectives of the 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarians?
- What did the 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarians share with the Age?
- What did the 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarians think about their role?

