

# England in 1819

By

Percy Bysshe Shelley

**MS. SANGEETA SETHI**

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION  
KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY,  
KURUKSHETRA



**DDE**

**Programme:  
B.A. General**

**Class:  
B.A. Part-I**

**Subject:  
English**

**Paper No. A**

**Lesson No. 2**

## Introduction

This presentation illustrates Shelley's sonnet 'England in 1819'. The poem is a description of prevalent political and economic conditions of England. The year 1819, is a disgusting reminder of the Peterloo massacre. The sonnet is a political satire, it reflects the poet's concern for liberty; his aversion to Monarchy and his belief in love and restoration of common man's dignity.

# Contents

1. Introduction,
2. Objectives
3. Paraphrase,
4. Questions

## Objectives

This presentation will enable you to:


1. Understand the text of the poem.
2. Study explanation contained in the lesson script  
No. 25, B.A. I English
3. Know the visionary and the idealist in Shelley who condemned the oppressive institution of Monarchy and passionately hoped that a new era of stability, equality and justice would restore human dignity.
4. Form your opinion about the age and the social order and its conflicts.
5. Equip yourself with skill to perform in examination situation.

# About the poet

- A leading poet of the Romantic Movement, a revolutionary, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was born to Timothy Shelley, a member of Parliament and highly respectable Sussex squire.
- After his education at Syon House Academy and Eton, he went to Oxford University in 1810.
- He was expelled from Oxford for Publishing a pamphlet under the provocative title 'The Necessity of Atheism'.
- Shelley's literary and political spirit of rebellion is reflected in his poems. He had a passion to reform the world on the basis of love, justice and freedom

- His works include *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Revolt of Islam* (1816), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and *Hellas* (1822).
- 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark', and 'Hymn to the Intellectual Beauty' are his fine Lyrics.

# About the poem

- The Sonnet is a Social satire.
  - Shelley wrote this poem when England was passing through a phase of social and industrial unrest and economic instability.
  - It expresses the poet's anger at the prevailing social order of England.
  - The poet fervently (strongly) hopes that out of decadent England would emerge a country having a spirit of liberty that guarantees equality, justice and freedom in political, economic and social fields.
- 

# Paraphrase

## Lines I to VI

- The poet calls the king, George III 'old', 'mad', 'blind', 'despised' and 'dying', as the king suffered from mental illness, his political influence declined.
- His sons took over the reigns but they too earned disfavour of the common man as they oppressed the poor who were starved to death in a very cruel manner.
- The poet compares the rulers of his country to leeches who survive on the blood of the common people.

## Lines VII & VIII

- These lines refer to the Peterloo massacre. It was on 16 August 1819 when a gathering of common men met (at St. Peters fields, Manchester) to declare their support for electoral reforms.

- The assembly was dispersed by Manchester magistrate's orders to arrest the speaker. With eleven persons killed and number of people injured, further restriction was imposed on public meetings.
- The poet feels that the army deployed for the masses was infact a two - edged sword. It carried the seeds of destruction and could turn against its master.

### **Lines IX & XIV**

- The legal system of England was at that time serving the interests of the rich, religion too had become Christless as the religious heads favoured the rich. The Bible became a 'book sealed'. The unreformed Parliament along with the rotten laws are imagined to be a cemetery from which a glorious spirit would emerge. This spirit would bring light of stability, equality and freedom to the existing turbulent (Violently excited) order



# Vocabulary

*despised* – something considered worthless; *dregs* – the most useless part; *dull race* – inactive legacy; *public scorn* – contempt of the public; *leech-like* – similar to leech; *liberticide* – killing liberty, suppressing freedom; *prey* – a victim of oppression; *wield* – to hold something and to use it as a weapon; *sanguine* – bloody; *Christless* – not having the presence of Christ; *statute unrepealed* – unreformed law passed by a official ruling body; *phantom* – spirit; *Burst* – emerge; *tempestuous* – violent.

## Questions (Short)

1. Why is the King George III despised?
2. The Princes are the 'dregs of their dull race'. Explain.
3. What makes England 'fainting country' for Shelley?

## Essay Type Question

1. Critically appreciate the poem England in 1819.