

## Jonathan Swift's Satirical Approach Towards Social, Political and Religious Evils

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### Abstract

The present research paper is analysing Jonathan Swift's Approach towards Social, Political and Religious Evils, the issues prevalent in the contemporary European Society. Jonathan Swift has tried to scrutinize the corrupt practices of the Eighteenth Century English rulers' governments, religious society, and people. He has successfully depicted the eighteenth century England where the religion was dominating over the society in toto. Through *Gulliver's Travel*, Swift has brought forth the maladies and follies of the contemporary European society. One can say that Swift's use of Gulliver to present the parody of the social circumstances of England is apt and it reveals a true picture of the contemporary English society. Through the satirical works, Swift has succeeded incorporating numerous instances of satire. In fact, his works are a reflection which unfolds the reality of the world.

**Keywords:** Jonathan Swift, Satirical Approach, Social, Political, Religious, Evils, Government

Jonathan Swift, the much debated and discussed satirist of Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries Europe. He was born in the year 1667 in Dublin. He was born an orphan as his father had passed away well before his birth. His mother and only sister had to take help of their relatives as to keep their body and soul together. Nevertheless, Swift was provided education at the prestigious Kilkenny Grammar School. Later, he went to Trinity College Dublin. At Dublin, Swift had to face charges of disciplinary matters but could manage to secure his college degree by 'special grace'. After the Revolution of 1688, Swift sought asylum in England.

Although people know Jonathan Swift for his ferocity to alienate people around him, I believe that this was partly true as he had been associating with many luminaries such as Bolingbroke and Pope. He also joined as the Secretary to Sir William Temple and remained associated with the latter until his demise in the year 1699. It was around this time that Swift had started writing verses. However, his poetry could never earn him fame and fortune. *A Tale of Tub* was his first satirical work. It was published simultaneously with two other works – *The Battle of Books* and *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*.

With the publication of these three books, people of England at once recognized them to be the masterpiece creation by the literary genius Jonathan Swift. Now Swift became a sensation in the field of British literary society and began to be recognized as an established political satirist. In 1695 while in Ireland Swift got ordained and conferred with a prebend at St. Patrick's Dublin. Later, he was accorded with the honour of dean St. Patrick. Since his early age Jonathan Swift was very much a pacifist. He was strongly opposed to cruelty against human beings, war, and imperialism. He had written innumerable articles and pamphlets on the issue of religion and war. He frequently travelled to London to convince the political stalwarts to bring normalcy in the disturbed Ireland provenance.

Jonathan Swift earned reputation in England and consolidated himself politically by showing his affinity to the Tory government which was ruling the country during that time. Swift's masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels* was published in the year 1726 which brought Swift overnight success and fame. Soon, the novel started a serious debate and people praised him for his bold satire in the novel.

*A Modest Proposal* was published in 1730. This satirical work recognized as the character of satiric political parody.

### ***A Tale of a Tub***

*A Tale of a Tub* is the earliest prose work of Jonathan Swift. In the introduction to the events of the novel, he writes:

“Therefore, towards the just performance of this great work there remain but three methods that I can think on; whereof the wisdom of our ancestors being highly sensible, has, to encourage all aspiring adventures, thought fit to erect three wooden machines for the use of those orators who desire to talk much without interruption. These are the Pulpit, the 15 Ladder, and the Stage-itinerant. For as to the Bar, though it be compounded of the same matter and designed for the same use, it cannot, however, be well allowed the honour of a fourth, by reason of its level or inferior situation exposing it to perpetual interruption from collaterals” (Swift 23-24).

*A Tale of a Tub* is a satire on the social order of seventeenth century England. Swift's satire enables us to be aware of the degradation of human values. In section II of the novel, we find a tragic description of an ailing father who, on his death bed, bequeathed all the three sons with no legacy of inheritance as he had not inherited any property, nor had he earned enough to buy any real estate to bequeath to his descendants -- three sons. Swift has satirically presented the materialistic approach of the three sons. They all were not wailing for their departing father, but they were wailing for not having inherited any property. Such as the social order of seventeenth century England:

“Sons, because I have purchased no estate, nor was born to any, I have long considered of some good legacies to bequeath you, and at last, with much care as well as expense, have provided each of you (here they are) a new coat. Now, you are to understand that these coats have two virtues contained in them; one is, that with good wearing they will last you fresh and sound as long as you live; the other is, that they will grow in the same proportion with your bodies, lengthening and widening of themselves, so as to be always fit. Here, let me see them on you before I die. So, very well! Pray, children, wear them clean and brush them often. You will find in my will (here it is) full instructions in every particular concerning the wearing and management of your coats, wherein you must be very exact to avoid the penalties I have appointed for every transgression or neglect, upon which your future fortunes will entirely depend. I have also commanded in my will that you should live together in one house like brethren and friends, for then you will be sure to thrive and not otherwise” (Swift 32)

*A Tale of a Tub* is a political allegory in which Swift has exploited the literary devices such as sarcasm, pun, satire, and symbolism to present the social lacuna of the seventeenth and eighteenth century which England had been witnessing. Swift has himself mentioned in the novel about the manner in which he viewed the society, and the cunning ways people tend to deal with each other. He described the characters of the people in vivid manners and while serving at the church in Ireland. Swift tried his level best to bring a revolutionary change in order to mend the society and the living standard of the common people:

“In my disposure of employments of the brain, I have thought fit to make invention the master, and to give method and reason the office of its lackeys. The cause of this distribution was from observing it my peculiar case to be often under a temptation of being witty upon occasion where I could be neither wise nor sound nor anything to the matter in hand” (Swift 106).

Thus, Jonathan Swift’s earliest satirical novel *A Tale of a Tub* reflects a true picture of seventeenth and eighteenth century English society. The novel is a clear mirror to look into the true picture of the people, life, culture, and religion.

### ***Gulliver’s Travels***

Jonathan Swift is globally recognized for all time political allegory *Gulliver’s Travels*. This novel is believed to be the best-ever political satire. The novel is a blatant attack on the political, social, and religious setup of seventeen and eighteen century England. *Gulliver’s Travel* came to the British literary society in the year 1726. This was the time when Swift was serving as a priest of Irish church. He depicted the character of Lemuel Gulliver in such a manner that the paradigm of satire reached its zenith height.

The natives of Lilliput were so tiny that appeared as insects to Gulliver. The Lilliputians captured Gulliver and imprisoned him to produce him before their king. The king was impressed to see such a huge fellow being as Gulliver. The publication of the novel brought Swift overnight success. He became the stalwart of satire and allegory. Now satire used to be recognized through Swift. But *Gulliver's Travels* caused sensation and thus it created a heated debate. Throughout the novel the readers are acquainted with a candid type of events and characters which reflect Swift's concept of using symbol, satire, allegory, and sarcasm in such a way that the readers throughout the ages get filled with a sense of humour:

“In part I alone ‘the reader’ is invoked twenty times more, and over the course of the whole book, the numerous addresses to the ‘candid’, ‘curious’, ‘courteous’, or ‘gentle reader’, become a reminder of the way Swift is subverting both the apparent form of his story and the kind of reading which it invites, in spite of itself. By the end of part IV, Gulliver can speak out directly against the genre he has imitated” (Demaria X-XI).

After reading the novel *Gulliver's Travels*, I believe that the best-ever political allegory is not only a simple novel or story but a bizarre difficult literacy genre of the satire. Swift's imaginative creation *Gulliver's Travels* dealt with all the standard topic of classical satire. Through this satirical work Swift endeavoured to present the brief history of England from 1649 to the accession of George I of the Elector of Honour to the English throne. Swift has elaborately described the crisis of the Tory ministry, the death of Queen Anne, etc. *Gulliver's Travels* is funnily read for its comical description of the events and characters. We find many descriptions in such a funny way that we enjoy reading the novel more and more:

“Golbasto Momarem Evlame Gurdilo Shefin Mully Ullly Gue, most mighty Emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand blustrugs (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; monarch of all monarchs, taller than the sons of men; whose feet press down to the centre, and whose head strikes against the sun; at whose nod the princes of the earth shake their knees; pleasant as the spring, comfortable as the summer, fruitful as autumn, dreadful as winter: his most sublime majesty proposes to the man-mountain, lately arrived at our celestial dominions” (Swift 43).

Thus, Jonathan Swift has successfully presented *Gulliver's Travels* as a satire with humorous descriptions in a vivid manner.

### ***A Modest Proposal***

*A Modest Proposal* is another important work by Jonathan Swift. In this satirical work Swift has tried to present satire in an ambiguous manner. In the beginning of *A Modest Proposal*, Swift has presented the events of *The Battle of the Books*. Swift has straight facedly

described that Ireland had the capacity to solve its hunger related concerns by using its children for food. This is a horrific attack on the political system of the time. The beginning of *A Modest Proposal* goes thus:

“It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes” (Swift 52).

The above passage reflects Swift’s concern for the future of the Irish children who were leading a pathetic life and their parents were shoving them to the particle of beggary. Swift was feeling restless to know and see the state of Irish children. He held the Irish people responsible and answerable to all these situations. He was irked to know about the amount of rate of birth in Ireland. But in Ireland there was no welfare scheme for such people, no arrangement for the poor and under privileged. Swift is worried about the future children of Ireland:

“The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom; but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year” (Swift 53).

“I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, where of only one fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine; and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females” (Swift 54).

Thus, Jonathan Swift has used satire as a medium, to bring forth social, political, and religious evils of the seventeenth and eighteenth century British society. He has successfully presented the condition of the poor under the harsh rulers who did not feel the need to uplift them.

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