

# RAPE OF THE LOCK

Alexander Pope

## ❖ Canto-1

The 'RAPE OF THE LOCK' is a mock-epic or mock-heroic epic. Alexander Pope begins the poem with the words,

***WHAT dire offence amorous causes springs,  
What mighty contests rise from trivial things,  
I sing-This verse to Caryll, Muse! Is due:  
This, even Belinda may vouchsafe to view:  
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,  
If she inspire, and he approve my lays.[1-6]***

Thus, the opening lines of the poem state its theme which is, that love affairs may lead to serious resentment (hatred, bitterness, anger, dislike), and that insignificant events may cause great conflicts. Pope invokes to the Muse of poetry and tells her that his friend, John Caryll has suggested writing this poem and that Belinda has also inspired it.

The poet asks the Muse what strange motive could compel an aristocrat, Lord Petre, to attack a gentle lady, Belinda and what stranger motive could compel a gentle lady to reject the suit of a Lord. Why would small men undertake such daring enterprises and why should soft hearted ladies fly in such a terrible rage?

The sun rises and Belinda opens her bright eyes. It is the time when lap-dogs shake their bodies and get up from their sleep, and lovers, who have not been able sleep throughout the night on account of the pangs of love, get up from bed. It is not morning, it is afternoon then also Belinda opens her eyes and falls asleep. Her sleep is prolonged because her guardian-sylph (Ariel) wants to speak to her in a dream. He addresses her as "fairest of mortals" and tells her that numerous bright spirits keep flying around her all the time. They surround her when she sits at her box in the theatre and hover (linger/hang around) around her when she took a drive through Hyde Park.

Ariel explains Belinda the nature of different categories of spirits. He tells her that the vanities of a woman do not die with her death (here, vanity means excessive pride). Even after death she continues to feel and interest in some of those vanities. After death she might not actually play cards, but she feels

interested in the cards held and played by other players. The pleasure that she feels in riding in a highly embellished carriage and the pleasure she took in playing ombre when she was alive, remains with her even after death. Pope says,

***“That all her vanities at once are dead;  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,” [2-3]***

He says that when the beautiful women die at the height of their pride, their spirits return to the elements (earth, air, fire and water).

- The spirits of violent and scolding women rise upwards in flames, known as fire – spirits.
- Those who have gentle and submissive natures enter – water in order to join the company of nymphs and sip tea which is the element water.
- Those who are serious minded and affect false modesty sink down words, they become gnomes and roam the earth to do mischief.
- The spirits of light – hearted, flirtatious women rise upward to become sylphs or spirits of the air and they fly about playfully in the aerial regions.

Pope writes,

***“Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face,  
For life predestined to the gnomes’ embrace.  
These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,  
When offers are disdained and love denied:” [79-82]***

The poet here satirizes at those girls of his contemporary age who are keen aware of their beauty and who are fated to spend their lives in the embraces of the gnomes/ or earth-sprits. Such girls imagine that they have very bright matrimonial prospects and therefore become conceited (proud). They refuse good offers of marriage and show indifference to their suitors in the hope. They hope that they will attract much better suitors. They do so under the influence of the gnomes, who fill their empty heads with vain ideas. Therefore these maidens can think of nothing but garters, peers, dukes, stars, coronets – noblemen who rear small crown or who have earned decorations, medals, their large retinues, etc.

In their imagination they hear themselves addressed in soft voices as duchesses. Pope says,

***“Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,  
While peers and dukes, and all their sweeping train  
And garters, stars, and coronets appear,  
And in soft sounds, Your Grace salutes their ear.” [83-86]***

Thus, they leave the path of virtue, and drive out their foolish or worthless intentions from their minds by introducing new follies. There is hardly a young girl who will not fall a victim to a man who gives an entertainment in her honor.

***“With varying vanities, from every part,  
They shift the moving toyshop of their heart;” [99-100]***

Different young gallants appeal to the different vanities which a young girl has gathered from different sources, with the result that her heart shifts from one gallant to another like a moving toy-shop. One young man with a wig for on his head contends with another, also wearing a wig, for the heart of a girl. One fashionable young man wishes to defeat another by winning the heart of a young girl. One aristocratic suitor arrives in his coach to oust a rival, also having a coach from the affections of a maiden.

Then Pope introduces the name of Belinda’s guardian Sylph-Ariel, who says to Belinda,

***“Of these am I, who thy protection claim,  
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.  
Late, as I ranged the crystal wilds of air,  
In the clear mirror of thy ruling star  
I saw, alas! Some dread event impend,  
Ere to the main this morning sun descend,  
But Heaven reveals not what, or how, or where:  
Warned by the sylph, oh pious maid, beware!” [105-112]***

Thus, Ariel warns Belinda that unfortunately some dreadful event will occur in her life before this morning sun sets. Yet, heaven has not told him what will happen, how it will happen or where it will happen.

Thus, he gives her terrible information in advance and suggests her to become cautions and says,

***“This to disclose is all thy guardian can.  
Beware of all, but most beware of man!”  
He said;” [113-115]***

However, Belinda is still sleeping. Her lap-dog, Shock, thinks that Belinda has slept too long, she should wake up. Therefore it licks her face. Belinda opens her eyes and finds a love-letter waiting for her. After reading this letter, with its mentioned of the wounds of love, the charms of love and the ardor (passion/love) of love, Belinda forgets completely all those things which Ariel has told her in her dream. She gets ready for her toilet.

- Wearing a white robe, she first addresses prayer to the “cosmetic powers”.
- Then she looks at her heavenly reflection in the mirror.
- Betty-the inferior priestess assists Belinda in the sacred ceremony of toilet.
- Numerous caskets (treasure chest) are opened. These caskets reveal their precious contents brought from different countries of the world.
- From each casket, Betty skillfully selects some bright and precious article to decorate the Goddess Belinda.
- From one casket she selects the most brilliant pearls and diamonds of India, from another she chooses the perfumes of Arabia.
- Her spotted combs are made of tortoise-shell and
- Then she pays attention on the rows of shining pins, puffs, powders, patches, bibles, and love-letters.

Thus, beauty of Belinda is greatly enhanced by cosmetics and by ornaments. These effects are in fact created by the busy sylphs who surround her and take care of each detail of her toilet, but Belinda gives whole credit to Betty who helps her in decorating her. In canto I Pope’s description of Belinda at the dressing-table becomes the target-a subject of his satire.

He satirizes at the excessive attention that women paid to their toilet. The most amusing line of satire here is the line in which the poet talks about pins, puffs, powders, patches, bibles, and love-letters.

***“Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux.  
Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;  
The fair each moment rises in her charms,  
Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,  
And calls forth all the wonders of her face;  
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,  
And keener lightnings quickens in her eyes.  
The busy sylphs surround their darling care,  
These set the head, and those divide the hair,  
Some folds the sleeve, while others plait the gown;  
And Betty’s praised for labours not her own.”[138-148]***

Here, we find mock-epic elements like,

- The invocation to the Muse in the opening lines follows the epic manner of the Iliad.
- Beginning part of the poem also deals with a proposition of whole work. We have been told about the subject i.e. – slight (a trivial.)
- The element of war here, we find dispute between two families, because of Mr. Petre’s act of stealing a lock of a fashionable lady, named, Belinda.
- Satire is one of the most important characteristics of the Mock-heroic epic. Here, Pope fiercely satirizes at the young generation-contemporary Age-through the character, behavior, habit of Belinda and her lovers and Mr. Petre.
- Mock-heroic epic deals with almost all characteristics of an epic poem, like, grand style, use of poetic diction, epic simile, description of Nature, message, except grand subject, and so we find them in ‘The Rape of Lock’.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, poets in general and epic poets in particular, formed their language very largely.

Literature of this Age was an attempt to go back to the ancient classical antiquity. They have followed the literary style of Virgil, Homer, Ovid and even Milton. IN ‘The Rape of Lock’ Pope has also used poetic diction as a part of the mock-heroic scheme.

e.g. "Sol" – it is used for sun

- The use of super natural element is another characteristic of an epic and mock-heroic epic as well.
- The word that Pope has used for supernatural element is "the machinery". He has introduced supernatural elements like,
- Ariel-Belinda's guardian-sylph, a spirit of air. He warns Belinda in her morning dream that a misfortune would befall her in the course of the day.
- Others are salamanders, nymphs, gnomes and sylphs. The function of the sylphs is to protect the purity and virtue of young maidens.

## ❖ Canto-2

In Canto II Pope highly praises the beauty of Belinda. Pope writes that the way the sun rises with all its splendor in the sky and throws its crimson radiance over the ocean, in the same way Belinda competes in brightness with the sun. Like Sun she comes out of her house with great splendor and gets into a boat and sails upon the surface of the silver-bright water of the river Thames. Beautiful ladies and finely dressed young gentlemen glitter around her. The eyes of everyone are fixed on her only. She has worn a glittering cross on her bosom and Pope says that even Jews and other who do not believe in divine quality of Christ would have worshipped that cross because of the beautiful breast on which it shines. Her beautiful glances are a proof of her alert mind which is as quick as her eyes and as unstable as her glances.

Belinda gives her smile to very body but does not pay any special attention towards any one. In a most inoffensive manner she rejects the advances of a man. Whoever looks at her is dazzled by the brightness of her eyes as a person is dazzled by the light of the sun. According to Pope Belinda's eyes shine uniformly on all around her just as the sun shines in an impartial manner over all.

In this canto Pope describes two beautiful locks of hair of Belinda. They hang gracefully in equal curls. They wreck the peace of mind of men. It seems that these locks with their bright ringlets have an agreement with each other to embellish Belinda's smooth and ivory white neck. Men who look at her would have been captured by and kept as prisoners in the maze of her hair. Even if they have strong hearts then also they become the victim of the charm of her delicate hair. Pope writes,

***"This nymph, to the destruction of mankind, Nourished two locks, which graceful hung behind  
In equal curls, and well conspired to deck  
With shining ringlets the smooth ivory neck:  
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,  
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains." [19-24]***

According to Pope we catch birds with traps and fish with fishing lines in which horse-hair is used. Similarly men are caught in the trap of women's fair curls. A beautiful woman can attract a man with a single hair. Pope writes,

***"And beauty draws us with a single hair."***

Now, Pope introduces that character who is directly responsible for the rune of Belinda's lock of hair and for her wrath- "The adventurous Baron" i.e. Lord Petre.

Lord Petre admires Belinda's bright locks. He longs for them; he is filled with an ambition to possess that treasure. To carry out his purpose he thinks of some device that he can employ. He is ready to rob Belinda, for that he is even ready to use fraud. Pope says,

***"For when success a lover's toil attends,  
Few ask, if fraud or force attained his ends."***

In order to attain his object, the Baron prays before sunrise to heaven to grant him success. He prays to every heavenly power, but chiefly to Love. He raises an altar to Love. This altar is made of twelve huge French romance-books. He also places there three garters, half a pair of gloves, and all other tokens of his conquests in previous love affairs. He lights a fire with passionate love letters, which he has received in the past and heaves (throws) three passionate sighs in order to add fuel to the fire which is to burn the offerings that have been heaped together. And thus he request to Love with passionate looks to help him to obtain that treasure without delay and to possess it for a long time. The deities listen to his prayer and grant half of it, while other half of his prayer is scattered by the winds in empty air.

Belinda is smiling and the whole world looks happy. They all are in merry mood except Ariel, who invisibly accompanies Belinda. He thinks about the approaching misfortune. To take all the necessary precautions, he summons his fellow-spirits. Ariel is perched (balanced) on the mast (post) of the boat, while his fellow-spirits form a circle around him.

Ariel then addresses to his fellow-spirits. He tells them the reason for why they have been summoned. He reminds them that now it is their duty to look after the welfare of beautiful ladies. They have to,

- Save the powder from the cheeks of beautiful ladies from being blown away by the wind
- Save the bottled perfumes from evaporating
- Curl the ladies to blush more effectively.

On this particular day, they have to protect Belinda against a serious misfortune. The nature of the misfortune is not known. It may be,

- This beautiful lady would allow her chastity to be violated or
- Some delicate China jar in her house will crack or
- She would lose some gallant or
- She would lose a necklace at a ball or
- Her pet dog, Shock, would meet a tragic end.

Then, Ariel assigns various duties to various sylphs. To fifty selected sylphs. He entrusts the important responsibility of protecting Belinda's petticoat. He warns all the sylphs that they will be punished if they do not follow his instruction. Thus, finally they surround the beautiful Belinda in circles to form an effective bodyguard for her.

The act of Belinda's decorating herself with the beauty aid like, puffs, powders, patches, bibles; billets-doux etc. are the subjects of satire of the poem because it shows that the chief preoccupation of the ladies is their appearance or look by which they attract the young gallants. The catalogue of punishments and torments to which the negligent sylphs are to be subjected has a mock heroic quality.

### ❖ CANTO-3

The boat carries Belinda and her party to Hampton Court, a palace where the great Queen Anne sometimes held political consultations with her advisers and sometimes attended tea-parties. At this palace the gallant young men and the beautiful young ladies come to enjoy the royal court. They pass their hours here in talking of different subjects and thus add to their knowledge. The subject of their conversation remains always trivial. They talk about the subjects likes,

- Who gave the dance party
- Who paid the last visit to the court
- They talk about the glory of the British Queen
- Beauty of a Indian screen

- The meaning of the gestures, the glances, and the expression in the eyes of certain ladies and gentle men
- A gentleman talks about snuff or a lady's fluttering her fan, with singing, laughing, amorous staring and similar other actions.

It is now afternoon. It is the time when the hungry judges are in hurry to sign their judgments, when member of jury hurriedly give their verdict of guilty against the accused, when the traders return from the exchange to find some peace and when ladies complete their long labor of dress in themselves to get ready for dinner.

At this hour Belinda is urged by a desire to become famous, meets two adventurous knights in a contest at ombre. The three contestants immediately got ready for the battle. Each player holds nine cards. At one stage it seems that Belinda would lose the game, but in the end she wins. She feels delighted with her triumph and her shouts of joy seem to reach the sky. Here, Pope satirizes at Belinda's sudden expression of emotion,

***“O thoughtless mortals! Ever blind to fate,  
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.  
Sudden, these honours shall be snatched away,  
And cursed for ever this victorious day.” [101-104]***

Poor Belinda does not know that her victory will soon be converted into a day of disgrace for her. However, this victory adds charm to Belinda's beauty. The group of airy spirits hovers (flies) around the beautiful Belinda.

- Some of them fan the steaming coffee in order to cool it so that it may not injury her mouth when she slips it.
- Some spread their wings carefully over her lap as a precaution against her gown made of rich and costly material, becoming soiled by falling drops of coffee.
- The fumes of coffee that stimulate the minds of politician, rise to Baron's brain and encourage him to imply a new method of obtaining Belinda's bright lock of hair.

Here, Pope writes,

***“But when to mischief mortals bend their will,  
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!”[125-126]  
Just at that time, a lady called Clarissa take out from her shining  
case a pair of scissors. Pope writes,  
“Just then, Clarissa drew, with tempting grace,  
A two-edged weapon from her shining case;  
So ladies in romance assist their knight,  
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.” [127-130]***

The Baron is tempted to make use of this weapon. He takes the scissors and spreads them just behind her (Belinda’s) neck in order to cut off one of the two locks. At this a thousand sylphs immediately come to protect Belinda’s hair. Just at that moment Ariel discovers that there is a human lover hidden in Belinda’s heart. He realizes that he can no longer protect her, as spirits can protect only maidens who are pure and not room in their hearts for earthly lovers.

Seeming no alternative, Ariel reconciles himself to what is about to happen and he withdraws from the scene. The Baron then cuts off a lock of Belinda’s hair. Belinda grown furious when she realizes what has happened. Lightning seems to flash from her eyes and her screams of horror rends the skies. Pope writes,

***“Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,  
And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying heav’n are cast,  
When husbands, or when lapdogs, breathe their last;  
Or when rich china vessels fallen from high,  
In glittering dust, and painted fragments lie!”  
[155-160]***

Pope says that when a woman loses her husband or her lap-dog, she does not utter such loud cries to seek pity or sympathy of gods as Belinda uttered on this occasion. Nor does a woman utter such loud cries when her rich china pots fall from a height and are broken into glittering and painted pieces to lie on the ground.

The victorious Baron feels jubilant on having possession of the glorious prize, namely, Belinda’s lock of hair. He says that his name, his glory and his fame will live as long as the fish swim joyfully in streams; the birds fly about happily in the air. He makes realizes Belinda realizes the power of steel

- Thus, the canto III begins in the mock heroic manner. On the one hand Pope gives the description of Hampton Court, then a mingling of the great and then little-the great Queen Anne sometimes taking counsel and sometimes tea.

***“Close by those meads, for ever crowned with flowers,  
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,  
There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
Which from the neighbouring Hampton takes its name.  
Here Britain’s statesmen oft the fall foredoom  
Or foreign tyrants, and of nymphs at home;  
Here thou, great Anna! Whom three realms obey,  
Dost sometimes counsel take-and sometimes tea.” [1-8]***

- The description of the card-game is masterly.
- The lines in which Pope speaks about the hungry judges, the jurymen, the merchants returning from the exchange etc. are part of the satire of on 18<sup>th</sup> century life.
- Pope’s Age is also famous for the Coffee-House Culture. The description of coffee-making and coffee-drinking is also as part of his satire on the life of the time. Pope writes the fumes of the coffee, made the politician wise and enable him to see through all things with half shut eyes.
- The manner in which the Baron clipped the lock from Belinda’s head is very amusing. The reason for why Ariel withdraws from the scene again a fierce satire at the youngster of Pope’s Age who takes the relation for granted. No purity, no understanding, no transparence, no seriousness is there.
- Through Belinda’s wrath and her screams of horror are examples of “comic pathos”, where we find the person lamenting for the trivial thing and remains completely unconcerned for the tragedy.
- We find obscenity in the Baron’s declaration that the winning of lock of Belinda’s hair will bring him immorality.

## ❖ CANTO-4

In the beginning of the canto IV Pope has described the rage, resentment and despair of Belinda. He says, that the youthful kings, who are captured alive in battle, scornful old maids who have lost their charms, passionate lovers who have been deprived of the pleasures of love, aged ladies whose desire to be kissed has been frustrated, have never experienced such anger, fury, and helplessness as the sad maiden, Belinda does over the rape of her hair. Pope writes,

***“And secret passions labored in her breast.”***

By the words “secret passions” Pope says that Belinda loves the Baron secretly and yet she feels annoyed with him because of his act of stealing the lock of her hair which has brought indignity.

Now Pope introduces a new gnome, namely Umbriel.

- Umbriel is the name of a spirit of the earth. He is a coarse and crude spirit, while Ariel is highly refined. The dark central regions of the earth are the most suitable environment for him.
- Goddess Ill-temper is the personification of ill- temper, gloom, discontent and disgruntlement.
- Goddess of Spleen is the presiding deity from whom all the gnomes or earth spirits draw their strength Belinda now fall under the influence of Umbriel who is a gnome.

He flies at great speed and reaches at the dark tomb-like a dwelling place of the Goddess of Spleen (Spleen is an imaginary being like a tiny man). Here in a cave, the Goddess reclined on her bed sighing thoughtfully. At her side sits pain and at her head is Megrim the evil spirit responsible for causing severe headaches. On one side stands Ill-nature she looks like a maid who has grown aged but has remained unmarried. She prays in morning, noons, and nights but her heart is full of abusive satires. On other side stands Affectation (is a personification of pretended modesty and delicacy). She has a pale appearance but she manages to produce by artificial means the rosy freshness of a girl of 18 in her cheeks.

Umbriel tells the Goddess that he makes ladies lose color at the thought of losing a game of cards. He has often marred the beauty of a woman by raising a

pimple on her lovely face. He has often made ladies turn pale when they were playing cards in order to create the impression upon others that these ladies were afraid of losing the game. He makes invisible horns grown on the heads of husbands, so as to make those husbands suspect the royalty of their wives. He has disordered the petticoats of women to create the impression that the petticoats have been ruffled by their lovers. He has often rubbed off a cosmetic from the lips of a woman in order to create the impression that she has been kissed by a man even though nobody has been guilty of that act. He has sometimes disordered the headdress of a woman, who pretends to be excessively moral, in order to create the impression that a lover has been playing with her hair. He wishes that Goddess Spleen may infect Belinda with ill-humour. He reports to the deity Spleen that there is a beautiful lady who is totally unaffected by power of spleen because she always remains cheerful and carefree. Not only that, this beautiful lady keeps large numbers of other people also in a happy and carefree state. This beautiful lady is nobody else but Belinda who has not yet fallen a prey to fits of moodiness, ill-humour, or nervous depression.

The Goddess Spleen gives to Umbriel a bag which contains mainly the anger and fury of women, the bottle contains their fears, sorrows, griefs, sighs, sobs, screams, curses, loud quarrels and disputes, angry words etc.

Umbriel is very happy having received these gifts from Spleen. He flies to the earth and tears the swollen bag directly over the heads of Belinda and Thalestries. When the bag is opened over the heads of Belinda and Thalestris, Belinda's close friend, their hearts are filled with resentment, indignation and fury as also with distress, misery and grief. Belinda begins to burn with more anger than human beings can normally experience.

Thalestris also feels infuriated and begins to utter angry and violent words which add fuel to the fire raging in Belinda's heart. The loud words of Thalestris are echoed by the walls of Hampton Palace. Here Pope satirizes at the loud and unlady like shouts which aristocratic ladies can utter and their loss of self-control when their pride of vanity have been hurt.

Thalestris in an angry voice describes the enormous labour that Belinda had spent in looking after her beautiful hair. She says,

***“O wretched maid!’ she spread her hands, and cried,  
(While Hampton’s echoes, ‘Wretched maid!’ replied)  
‘Was it for this you took such constant care  
The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare?” [95-98]***

Thalestris says that she can already visualize Belinda shedding tears in her distress. She imagines the horrible things people will say about Belinda. She thinks about their would be gossip in which Belinda’s health and beauty will be degraded. Her good reputation will be lost. Thalestris says that the Baron will wear that lock of hair in a ring and it will show his victor and defeat of Belinda. She says that it may be possible for grass to grow in Hyde Park Circus and it may be possible for gentlemen-authors to live in a poor locality within the sound of the bells of the church of St. Mary-le-Bow, but it should not be possible for the Baron to keep the lock of hair. Earth, air, sea may all be overtaken by confusion, and men, monkeys, lap-dogs, and parrots may all perish but the Baron should not be allowed to keep the lock of hair. Thalestris goes to Sir Plume and requests him to recover the precious lock from Lord Peter, but all efforts go in vain as Mr. Petre says that he would keep the lock always with him.

As if it were not enough Umbriel- the hateful earth –spirit, is not satisfied with what he has achieved, he breaks the bottle from which many sorrows issued forth.

Belinda repents for the day. She says,

***“What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam?  
Oh had I stayed, and said my prayers at home!  
‘Twas this, the morning omens seemed to tell,  
Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell;  
The tottering China shook without a wind,  
A sylph too warned me of the threats of fate,  
In mystic visions, now believed too late!”***

Thus, Belinda repents for those foolish ideas that urged her mind to roam about in the company of young lords. She wishes she had stayed at home and led a religious kind of life. She recalls all those bad omen that occurred in the morning. The patch-box fell from her shaky hands three times. The China cup shook and swayed noisily even though no wind was blowing. Not only this her pet parrot, Poll also sat silent. Her pet lap-dog, Shock was also very indifferent to her. Not only

this, she also recalls that sylph who had come in her dream who had warned her of the disaster that fate had in store for her.

Belinda says that it is painful to see the pitiful remainder of her hair which has been treated so scornfully by the Baron. It was her habit to part her hair in two black locks which together used to lend new charms to her fair neck. The one remaining lock now finds itself alone and appears to unattractive. It feels that it will meet the same fate which its companion has met. It wants those scissors to put an end to its life by cutting it off, and invites the disrespectful hands of the Baron to repeat his impious act. She says,

***“Oh hadst thou, cruel! Been content to seize  
Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!” [175-176]***

Thus she asks why the Baron could not feel satisfied by cutting off some hair from another part of my head so that her loss had not been so prominent, why he could not spare that lock of hair and cut off some other bunch.

Here, Pope satirizes

- At those aristocratic ladies who take great pains in order to curl their hair. According to Pope, women are concerned for their reputation in order to maintain a good reputation.
- The lines describing the contents of the bag contains “sighs, sobs, passions and flowing tears” and the phial handed over by the Goddess Spleen to Umbriel are other examples of Pope’s satirical quality.
- The word “honour” is used not in the sense of chastity or purity but in the sense of mere reputation. A woman cares more for the preservation of her reputation than for the preservation of her reputation than for the preservation for her chastity.

## ❖ CANTO-5

In canto-5 Pope has introduced his mouth piece-Clarissa. She draws attention of all. Every one becomes silent. She says that why beautiful women are so greatly admired and honoured. Why they are the objects of the passion of even wise men and why boastful Young men propose to them. Why they embellish themselves with all the garments and ornaments from all parts of the world. Why the men address them as angels and worship them as angels. Why they surround their carriage and why they, occupying the side-boxes in at the theatre in the most distant rows of seats, bow respectfully to ladies.

Clarissa says that all these honours which women receive and try hard to obtain are useless unless they are able to retain by their good sense what they win by their beauty. Clarissa says that women should retain these honours, so that when they are sitting in the front boxes at the theatre, men may say with reference to them 'Look at that lady, she is foremost in good sense and intelligence just as she is foremost in beauty.' By dancing through the night and by putting on beautiful dresses throughout the day lady cannot keep away the small pox or prevent old age from over taking her. If it were so then no woman would like to get married and no woman would acquire any useful household accomplishment. A woman's locks of hair, whether curled or uncurled, shall turn grey when she grows old. A woman's face, whether painted or not painted, shall fade. The only appropriate course that remains for the women, is to make the fullest use of the power of their beauty and no matter what else they lose, they should take care not to lose their humour.

But Clarissa's speech produces no effect. Thalestris, with the help of other women attacks at the Baron. It is an epic fight in which gods and goddesses are shown. She kills many of the men with angry looks from both her eyes.

- One of them- a wit, collapsed with words in praise of Thalestris's beauty on his lips.
- Another fellow- a dandy, died like a swan singing a song of love.

However, their efforts go in vain. Belinda rushes at the Baron and throws a pinch of snuff at a point exactly below his nostrils. He begins to sneeze and the even the tears also start flowing. Then she draws out a hair-pin which becomes a dagger like instrument in her attack. She shouts for the return of her lock of hair.

She speaks more angrily even than the furious Othello demanding the handkerchief from his wife, Desdemona. But her lock does not found anywhere. Various opinions are offered for the disappearance of the lock.

Pope writes that only the Muse of poetry knows if it has flown. The Muse has seen the lock ascending to the sky in the shape of a new star with a long line of hair trailing behind it. There in the sky the lock of hair would remain forever. The fashionable people would survey it from the Mall. The happy lovers would take it to be Venus. The astrologer would see it through his telescope and predict the downfall of Louis XIV of France or prophesy the fall of Rome.

In the end of the poem the poet urges Belinda to stop lamenting the loss of a lock of her hair. Her lock is now adding a new luster to the bright heavens. She herself will die in course of time but that particular lock of her hair will be immortalized by the Muse of poetry as a sacred object. The Muse will give to that lock, which is now a constellation, the name of "Belinda".

## Q - Discuss *the rape of lock* as a mock heroic epic- satire at Pope's contemporary age

To discuss 'The Rape of Lock', we must be clear with what we call the epic.

An epic or a heroic poem is one that tells the story of a hero whose exploits have a national significance. It is a long, narrative poem written in an eminent style. It is a long, narrative poem written in an epic form and served as models for later writers. The epic hero is often a great national figure. In 'Paradise Lost', Adam is the father of the entire human race. The action of an epic is built on a vast scale. In the 'Odyssey', it covers the events of the Trojan War and the wanderings of Odysseus on his way home from the war. In 'Paradise Lost', it moves between heaven, hell and earth. The epic hero is more than human, for his fate and the fate of his nation are the concern of the gods or God. Heaven intervenes in his affairs by means of divine agents like gods or angels, who are referred to as the epic machinery. The style of the epic is elevated to suit its high theme, it means in an epic we find grand subject presented in a grand style.

Generally poet begins an epic with the declaration of the theme and with an invocation either to the heavenly Muse or to the Muse of Poetry to assist him in the task. The beginning of the action is told in retrospect, and sometimes its ultimate conclusion foretold at the end of the poem. So 'Paradise Lost' begins with Satan and his followers already in hell and the events which led to their fall from heaven are related to Adam. Similarly, at the end of the poem, Michael recounts to Adam the chief episodes of Old Testament history which lead up to the coming up of Christ, the second Adam, who will heal the breach between mankind and God.

The mock-heroic epic is a poetic form which uses the epic structure but on a miniature scale and with a subject that is mean or trivial. Its purpose is satirical: to make the subject look ridiculous by placing it in a framework entirely inappropriate to its importance.

'*The Rape of Lock*' is the best-known and most brilliant example of the mock-heroic epic by Alexander Pope. The central incident of the poem is based on a real incident in which Mr. Petre cuts off the lock of hair of a beautiful lady

namely, Arabella Fermor, which results into a dispute between two families which have social, religion and family ties.

By placing this incident in such a framework, Pope hoped to show the rape as trivial and so to reconcile the two families. No doubt, he fails in this purpose, but this work gives the reader an everlasting pleasure. The employment of the “machinery” which every epic is supposed to require, and many passages in which scenes and phrases from the great epics are directly imitated and burlesqued. All these things are so admirably managed that the work is considered as the most perfect thing of its kind in English literature. However, it is acquaintance with the classical epics for the fullest enjoyment, since the invocations, the speeches and classic similes.

*‘The Rape of Lock’* is the master piece of the mock-heroic because it mocks at the maximum amount of the epic. It is a parody of the epic poem, at its form, manner with its invocations, its simile, its frequent use of “He said”, use of machinery, and its battles, its journeys on water and down to the underworld.

We find Belinda flashing lightning from her eyes. In order to attain his object, the Baron prays before sunrise to heaven to grant him success. He prays to every heavenly power, but chiefly to Love. He raises an altar to Love. This altar is made of twelve huge French romance-books. He also places there three garters, half a pair of gloves, and all other tokens of his conquests in previous love affairs. He lights a fire with passionate love letters, which he has received in the past and heaves (throws) three passionate sighs in order to add fuel to the fire which is to burn the offerings that have been heaped together. And thus he request to Love with passionate looks to help him to obtain that treasure without delay and to possess it for a long time. The deities listen to his prayer and grant half of it, while other half of his prayer is scattered by the winds in empty air.

Pope has also used supernatural elements like, salamanders, nymphs, gnomes and sylphs. The function of the sylphs is to protect the purity and virtue of young maidens.

He says that when the beautiful women die at the height of their pride, their spirits return to the elements (earth, air, fire and water).

- The spirits of violent and scolding women rise upwards in flames, known as fire – spirits.

- Those who have gentle and submissive natures enter – water in order to join the company of nymphs and sip tea which is the element water.
- Those who are serious minded and affect false modesty sink down words, they become gnomes and roam the earth to do mischief.
- The spirits of light – hearted, flirtatious women rise upward to become sylphs or spirits of the air and they fly about playfully in the aerial regions.

Thus, the poem is parodies of Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Spenser and Milton. Instances of burlesque-treatment in the poem include Belinda's voyage to Hampton Court which suggests the voyage of Aeneas up the Tiber in Virgil; the coffee party which is a parody of the meals frequently described in Homer; Belinda's petticoat which is treated as the shield of Ajax, and the combat at the end which recalls such fighting as may be found anywhere in the ancient epics. The Cave of Spleen is a parody of an allegorical picture that we can find in Spenser's poems. It is the poem of comparison between the arming of an epic hero and Belinda's dressing and using cosmetics in order to kill. She takes her arms for a battle as seriously as an epic hero takes for the battle. She uses two formidable weapons—a pinch of snuff and a bodkin, the latter proving deadly effect. Here is the climax of the mock-heroic battle.

In canto-5 Pope has introduced his mouth piece-Clarissa. She draws attention of all. Every one becomes silent. She says that why beautiful women are so greatly admired and honoured. Why they are the objects of the passion of even wise men and why boastful Young men propose to toast to them. Why they embellish themselves with all the garments and ornaments from all parts of the world. Why the men address them as angels and worship them as angels. Why they surround their carriage and why they, occupying the side-boxes in at the theatre in the most distant rows of seats, bow respectfully to ladies.

Clarissa says that all these honours which women receive and try hard to obtain are useless unless they are able to retain by their good sense what they win by their beauty. Clarissa says that women should retain these honours, so that when they are sitting in the front boxes at the theatre, men may say with reference to them 'Look at that lady, she is foremost in good sense and intelligence just as she is foremost in beauty.' By dancing through the night and by putting on beautiful dresses throughout the day lady cannot keep away the small pox or prevent old age from overtaking her. If it were so then no woman would like to get married and no woman would acquire any useful household accomplishment. A woman's locks of hair, whether curled or uncurled, shall turn grey when she grows old. A woman's face, whether painted or not painted, shall fade. The only appropriate course that remains for the women, is to make the

fullest use of the power of their beauty and no matter what else they lose, they should take care not to lose their humour.

The mock-heroic epic is generally written to reform society and therefore, Satire always remains in the center of the poem. In 'The Rape of Lock', we find Pope as the spokesman of his Age. It is an expression of the artificial life of the Age- of its card-playing, parties, toilets, lap-dogs tea-drinking, snuff-taking and idle-vanities. It is not only a satire on society. It is also a witty parody of the heroic style in poetry. Even the verse form is treated humorously. The satire in the poem is general.

Every part of the poem is excellently done, but notably fine are the descriptions,

- Of Belinda's toilet
- Of the game of cards
- Of the cutting of the lock as Belinda beds over the coffee-pot
- Of the gnome's visit to the Cave of Spleen

When we scrutinize the poem we find it Pope's most perfect piece. It is the epic of the reign of Queen Anne and the only epic possible for that age of reason. The fault of the Age can be clearly seen and even feel in the poem, where the trivial thing has been given much importance rather than life and relation.

The poem depicts the artificial tone of the Age and the playful aspect of womanliness. It is the epic of trifling. It is about pleasure seeking life of fashionable beauty, of the toilet-chamber and card table. Here pope depicts,

- The stylishness and the emptiness
- The meanness and the vanity
- The jealousies, treacheries and intrigues of the social life of the aristocracy of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the very beginning of the poem we are told about the idleness, late-rising and fondness for domestic pets of the aristocratic ladies of the time. Belinda wakes up at 12 o'clock and falls asleep again. We are also told about superficiality of the ladies and their ambition to marry peers and dukes, or men holding other high titles.

***"Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,  
While peers and dukes, and all their sweeping train."***

The women of the time felt glad to receive love-letters. For them to keep domestic pets such as dogs and parrots is a matter of pride-vanity. They treated toilet as their chief concern. Therefore, in one important passage in the poem Belinda is described at her dressing-table. Before commencing her toilet operation, she offers a prayer to the “cosmetic powers”.

The ladies have no moral scruples. Honour is a work with little meaning for them, and “reputation” is more important to them than honour.

The loss of “honour” does not matter if “reputation” is not lost. In the poem a frail china-jar receiving a crack is equated with a lady’s losing her chastity. A lady’s missing a dance-party is taken as serious a matter as her forgetting her prayers, her losing her necklace is as serious as losing her heart. The death of a lap-dog or the breaking of a rich China-vessel is a serious a matter to the lady as the death of her husband. These are the examples of superficial nature of the ladies of the time. There is a complete confusion of moral values in their minds. Belinda has no real sense of feminine virtue or honour. She is in love with the Baron, and therefore Ariel gives her up when he sees “an earthly lover lurking at her heart”. Her lament over the loss of a lock of her hair is sheer hypocrisy. She feels unhappy because the loss of this particular lock of hair was vital to her charm. She would not have been much hurt if the Baron had stolen any other hair.

***“Oh, hadst thou, cruel been content to seize  
Hairs less in sight or any hairs but these!”***

Like ladies, even the aristocratic young men of the time were lacking in any serious purpose of morality. Florio and Damon represent them. Different young gallants appeal to the different vanities which a young girl has gathered from different sources, with the result that her heart shifts from one gallant to another like a moving toy-shop. One young man with a wig for on his head contends with another, also wearing a wig, for the heart of a girl. One fashionable young man wishes to defeat another by winning the heart of a young girl. One aristocratic suitor arrives in his coach to oust a rival, also having a coach from the affections of a maiden.

Their life is as empty and shallow as the life of the ladies which is represented by the empty headed Sir Plume with his “unthinking face”. He is proud of his snuff-box.

Their subject of discourse at court, also represent Pope’s contemporary life. They talk about the subjects likes,

- Who gave the dance party
- Who paid the last visit to the court
- They talk about the glory of the British Queen
- Beauty of a Indian screen
- The meaning of the gestures, the glances, and the expression in the eyes of certain ladies and gentle men
- A gentleman talks about snuff or a lady's fluttering her fan, with singing, laughing, amorous staring and similar other actions.

Pope uses hyperbolic language in describing her faultless beauty and even divinity, e.g. "nymph", "maid", "the fair", "virgin", "Goddess", etc. Pope never loses even a single opportunity to satire her. She is portrayed as a lady having a care-free temper.