

## Sir Roger at Church

Of Joseph Addison's prose, Dr. Johnson said, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." Addison's main literary work was comprised in the essays he contributed to The Tatler and in The Spectator. If not so robust or original as Steele, he is more elegant and restrained, and less sentimental; and he developed, with a surer eye for character, the Spectator Club, and in particular the Roger we know. Most of Addison's essays are social documents of the eighteenth century English society. According to Myres, "It is necessary to study the work of Joseph Addison in close relation to the time in which he lived, for he was a true child of his century. . . ." Addison is famous for his "middle style" associated with graceful rhythm. Dr. Johnson complimented Addison: "His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not grovelling, pure without scrupulosity, and extra without apparent elaboration, always equable, and always temper. . . he is never feeble, and he did not wish to be energetic; he is never rapid and he never stagnates. . . ." Addison used the language of the clubs and the coffee houses. His writing is a fantastic blend of humour and satire. His essays are not merely art for art's sake. Rather these are didactic by nature. Addison performs as a social reformer in his Coverley Essays. His essays have a prominent puritanical propaganda as his aim was to "enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality".

Humour is a remarkable trait of Addison. His essays are ironical, satirical and funny. It is not harsh or bitter but gentle and genial. Addison wants to rectify the society with his humorous approach. The essay begins with a motto from Pythagoras: "First in obedience to the country rites, Worship the immortal Gods"(Translated by J.H. Fowler). The essayist amuses the readers by his minute observation:

It is certain the country people would soon degenerate into a kind of savages and barbarians, were they not such frequent returns of a stated time, in which the whole village meet together with their best faces, and in their cleanliest habits, to converse with one another upon indifferent subjects, hear their duties explained to them, and join together in adoration of the Supreme Being. Sunday clears away the rust of the whole

week .

The most memorable figure of the Spectator's fictitious club is Sir Roger de Coverley invented by Steele and perfected by Addison. Sir Roger is presented in this essay titled "Sir Roger at Church" as lovable, kind, generous and eccentric. In his essay "Sir Roger at Home" , Addison unveils the individuality of his fictitious character named Sir Roger: "I have observed in several of my papers that, that my friend Sir Roger, amidst all his good qualities, is something of a humorist; and his virtues as well imperfections , are as it were tinged by a certain extravagance, which makes them particularly his, and distinguishes them from those of other men." Sir Roger is an ideal Tory clergyman. The essayist describes in "Sir Roger at Church": "My friend Sir Roger, being a good churchman, has beautified the inside of his church with several texts of his own choosing. He has likewise given a handsome pulpit-cloth, and railed in the communion table at his own expense." Sir Roger has appointed an itinerant singing master to go about singing and instructing the people in the tunes of the psalms.

In the congregation, Sir Roger keeps the parishioners in very good order. He often falls into a doze, but he will not allow anybody to have a nap. He would lengthen out a verse in the singing psalms; he pronounces *Amen* three or four times to the same prayer. He would count the congregation to see if anybody is missing. In the midst of service he would call out John Matthews kicking his heels for his diversion. The authority of the Knight exerted in that odd manner, has a good impact on the parish. Sir Roger was not ridiculed for his eccentric behavior. Rather, according to the narrator, ". . .the general good sense and worthiness of his character, make his friends observe these little singularities as foils rather set off than blemish his good qualities." As he steps down pulpit, all tenants bow to him. Addison has portrayed Sir Roger as an epitome of human values. Sir Roger has a magnetic personality for his concern for others, ". . .and every now and then he enquires how such an one's wife, or mother, or son, or father do, whom he does not see at church; which is understood as a secret reprimand to the person that is absent."

On the catechizing day , he orders a Bible to be given to the boy who answers well and with he sends bacon to his mother. He gives the clerk a handsome salary to encourage others in the church service. The chaplain and Sir Roger have a fair understanding between them. It is significant as in the very next village people engage themselves in an unhealthy relation. The

animosity between the clergyman and the squire creates an unpleasant atmosphere in the neighbouring parish. Their enmity triggers up chaos in the village.

The portrayal of Sir Roger has a lasting impact on the readers. He indirectly teaches the readers to mend their manners and to become more and more social by erasing the barriers between men. We embrace the world of Roger to establish an ideal society where love, caring, fellow-feeling and catholicity of heart will reign supreme. The world of Sir Roger calls for a better, wiser and nobler society.

**In preparing this study material for the students , I have taken the help of A.S. Cairncross's "Eight Essayists" published by Macmillan India Limited , Roy and Chakraborty's "Helps to the Study of English Honours", SSMV English Department's article "Joseph Addison as an Essayist", and Dr. Hareshwar Roy's "Addison as an Essayist".**