Good morning, dear students! Hope, you have been trying to get the best out of this lock down period by concentrating upon your study. A new unit is shared in this Group today for some support in your study. It is: Edmund Burke’s ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.

\*Burke(1729-1797) wrote his book: ‘A Philosophy Inquiring into our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’ in an atmosphere where aesthetic matter received increased interest both in England and abroad. Discussion on the nature of Beauty and such other subjects were current at that time. Burke was influenced by this current of thoughts.

\*Burke in his work tries to bring a distinction between the Sublime and the Beautiful and in this regard he was influenced by Longinus.

\*He begins his book by a discussion on taste. In course of this discussion he explains what is imagination. According to him the mind is possessed by a creative power in the process of its pleasure of representation of the images of things in the order and manner in which they are received by the senses and the mind also finds pleasure in the process of combining those images in anew manner and according to a different order. This power is called imagination and to this belongs whatever is called wit, fancy, invention and the like.

\*Burke in his conception of imagination was influenced by Hume who was an empiricist.

\*He defines taste as the “faculty of the mind which is affected with and forms the judgement of the work of imagination.” Imagination and reason are both combined in taste. It does not remain at the level of instinct because reason enters into its workings and along with reason imagination also enters into it. In the assessment of a work of art imagination alone is not enough. It is to be supplemented by understanding that reason. So, taste has to be improved by the supplement of reason or by acquisition of knowledge. Difference in taste is not due to the strength or weakness of any mental faculty. A man having superior knowledge has a better taste than another whose mind is not broadened by such knowledge.

\*To Burke, “Beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses.”. Beauty , to him, therefore is not subjective as it is with the philosophers like Locke.

\*Burke makes a comparison between the sublime and the beautiful in his work and says that sublime objects are of vast proportion , rugged, formless, dark and gloomy. It is awe- inspiring. Darkness, vastness, silence etc. are capable of evoking this feeling which is something like a “delightful terror”.

\*Two quotations from Burke in this regard:

“The noise of vast characters raging storms, thunder or artillery awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind.”

“Power is sublime. For generally speaking everything that is sublime is some modification of power. Depth and height tend to arouse the idea of sublime more than length. Succession and uniformity of parts constitutes artificial infinite. Infinite is a sublime. Magnitude in building is sublime. Magnificence, a great profusion of splendid things, starry heaven, for instance is sublime. Strong light such as that of the sun and the loud sound, such as that of the thunder and roar of a lion are sublime.”

\*The sublime arouses the strongest emotion in human minds. The emotion is aroused by objects which excite pain and danger in the mind and hence the emotion so experienced can be fittingly expressed as ‘delightful terror’. Terror is a passion that arises from self preservation instinct. It is a consciousness of danger and death as such cannot be delightful except in extra-ordinary circumstances. When we know definitely that the causes of pain don’t affect us immediately and when such causes happen to be grand and magnificent we feel delight which is not exactly similar to the positive pleasure we derive from other subjects.

\*Burke makes a distinction between delight and pleasure. To him delight is a sensation which results from the removal of pain.

\*Along with sublime Burke discusses at length the material qualities that make an object something of sensible beauty.

\*He defines beauty as any quality which inspires the individual to feel affection toward that which is perceived as beautiful. Beauty has a positive social quality, in that it inspires love or affection toward whomever is perceives as beautiful.

\*He proposes that Beauty stimulates love, but the sublime excites horror. While beauty relaxes, sublime brings tension.

\*Quote: “ By beauty I mean that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love , or some passion similar to it”. He says that the things that inspire us to love we like to have near us.

\*Burke associates qualities of balance, smoothness, delicacy and colour with the beautiful, while he speaks of the sublime in terms of ‘vastness’ and terror’.

\* In an analysis of the sublime in his ‘Critique of Judgement’(1790), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant divided the sublime objects specified by Burke into two kinds: (1) The Mathematical sublime, encompassing the sublime of magnitude- of vastness in size or seeming limitlessness or infinitude in umber. (2) the ‘dynamic sublime’ encompassing the objects conducive to terror at our seeming helplessness before the overwhelming power of nature, provided that the terror is pleasurable by the safe situation of the observer. Kant in his criticism proposed that the emotion of sublime at its strongest proportion is an emotion of distress only and therefore no pleasure could belong to it.

\*Quote from Kant:

“…my first observation… will be found very nearly true; that the sublime is an idea belonging to self preservation. That it is therefore one of the most affecting we have. That the strongest emotion is an emotion of distress, and that no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it.” (CRITIQUE OF JUDGEMENT: Kant)