PREFACE

The present work aims at an assessment of Eighteenth Century Milton criticism, - both in terms of its intrinsic value, and its contribution to Milton's critical heritage in general.

Taste and concern vary from age to age, as well as from land to land. But the fundamental 'whys' and 'whats' of human life remain the same for men of all ages and of all places. When any individual grapples with these basic problems, efficiently and sincerely, he, at once, commands the attention of those who at all care to think about the meaning of life. Milton attracts his succeeding "intelligentsia", in a similar way. His originality in the grasp of reality and his impressive manner of communication drew the attention of his contemporaries as well as that of his successors. Of course, that does not necessarily imply that Milton satisfied all who came to him. But it positively highlights the significant fact that for all literary intellectuals of the world Milton proves himself a personality to reckon with. None can ever look him.

Reactions to Milton, to take account from the lifetime of the poet till date, are full of varities, contradictions as well as harmonies. The poet has been both criticised
and eulogised by different critics of different ages mostly on three major grounds of form, language and ideas. With respect to form, some critics like Addison and his followers call Milton a traditionalist in the line of the ancients or the Spensarians, while others like Johnson and his group hold him to be an iconoclast. The former group is again subdivided into three categories regarding the degree and outcome of Milton's traditionalism. One group of critics regards Milton superior even to Homer and Virgil, another gives the poet rather a lower status, while a third batch of critics observes that Milton's work is a cento of the former authors, too little changed. The critics, who regard Milton as an iconoclast, also differ among themselves in their reactions. Some are offended by the poet's non-conventional manners and make derogatory remarks. Others appreciate Milton's originality and maintain, conventions have nothing to do with such an original genius. Now regarding Milton's language and verse, according to different critics, these are either latinate, (and thus praiseworthy or blameworthy according to particular critics' own taste and temperament) or these are simply sublime, whether latinate or not. Milton's ideas also produce contradictory reactions - some critics observe that they obfuscate any literary worth, for they are inconsistent, deplorable and dead, while others think that - Milton's ideas
provide, in a sense, all necessary philosophy and humanism. Miltonic tradition, properly speaking, was established by the eighteenth century critics of the poet, though Dryden laid its foundation from within the Seventeenth Century. Their reaction, thus, carries a special significance. My work attempts a systematic study of this reaction and an assessment of the value of its significance.

The eighteenth century critics, most of whom were neo-classicists, must have found many of the non-conventional characteristics in Milton's works unacceptable. But, genuine lovers of literature as they were, they did not hesitate to shake off their tenets of classicism before the greatness of Milton's originality. For this broadness and boldness of critical outlook, the eighteenth century critics surely deserve special credit and their opinions too gain special interest.

Eighteenth Century Milton Criticism, due to its anticipatory character, has acquired an extra significance for the students of Milton. In Twentieth Century reaction to Milton, in particular, there are so many echoes of it. So, a thorough study of it is necessary not only as the basic stage of Milton's critical heritage but for a clear understanding of Milton criticism of other ages also.

The introductory chapter of the present work is a sort of background study of eighteenth century Milton criticism. Here, there is an effort to analyse the background causes
which go to make the Eighteenth Century criticism what it is and for the proper appreciation of its meaning focus is also thrown on the political, religious, economic and social conditions of the period which went a long way to create the literary taste and tenents of the age. The Eighteenth Century men of letters had their own literary criteria and fortunately for the poet, these turned out to be quite agreeable to the literary characteristics of his work, as a result of which the eighteenth century criticism of Milton became, broadly speaking, a chorus of Milton praise.

The next chapter provides primary information both about Milton's works and eighteenth century critical tenets and takes a bird's eye view of eighteenth century reaction to Milton. Brief accounts of Milton criticism of seventeenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries are also given, side by side, for a better understanding of the peculiar and anticipatory character of the Eighteenth Century reaction.

In the succeeding chapter, the contents of the four major Eighteenth century critics are discussed elaborately. I have placed these critics in order of their importance as Milton critics and not in chronological order. In the next chapter there is a general discussion of the contents of the minor critics of the age who are grouped by me in
accordance with the topic of their criticism.

Traversing through the above stages, one by one, in the final chapter, an humble attempt is made to ascertain the intrinsic value of the Eighteenth century Milton criticism as a whole as well as the significance of its contribution to the poet's critical heritage, in general.

At the end, let me add, due to non-availability of some books in separate and original editions, I have largely depended on the materials collected by reliable authorities and in this regard, I must acknowledge my debt to such writers as J. T. Shaweross, J.H. Handford, W. R. Parker, P. Murray, and E. M. W. Tillyard in particular.