

Cultural Matrix: Modernism and Its Genesis

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Abstract

This paper tries to vindicate that there are, broadly speaking, two types of modernism—cultural modernism and literary modernism. It focuses on cultural modernism, examining various cumulative facts and factors, which give birth to a new culture in the western world in the early decades of the twentieth century. It proves to be an intentional break with the past culture of the Enlightenment. The paper investigates as to how a number of social, political, philosophical, psychological, scientific theories, technological advancements, feminist demand, the First World War, urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, and the loss of social, moral, religious, and spiritual values changed the entire complexion of the western civilization. This drastic and radical change is noticed in all walks of life—in western art, literature, society, and culture, which determines the further course of the life of the twentieth century world. The main objective of this paper is how cultural modernism originates, grows, and breaks with the past and old culture, leaving a deep impact on the different disciplines, particularly arts and literature. The paper assumes that without having a clear-cut understanding of the cultural matrix of the west, it is rather an uphill task to unravel the intricate knot of modernism in English literature.

Key words: *Modernism, Enlightenment, Postmodernism, Marxism, Will-to-Power, and Freud.*

Introduction

In the current academic arena, ‘modernism,’ a confusion-ridden term, demands a huge debate, though it defies a clear-cut understanding. It has become so pervasive that we fail to disentangle ourselves from its presence. It permeates all the levels of society and emerges as a brainteaser to students, teachers, and scholars. They generally remain in a state of perpetual puzzle and perplexity. The entire spectrum of scholarly inquiries into modernism produces a host of definitions and explanations. Various historians and scholars have interpreted it from their own perspectives. Spears remarks: “Modernism is, of course, an impossible subject” (1970:3). J. C. Ransom holds that modernism is ‘undefined.’ To define any term is indeed

agitating, but modernism has special difficulties, because it has “no manifesto or organized principles” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 8). It takes a form of Pandora’s Box. The more scholars strive to understand and clarify its slippery concept, the more they get trapped in its tortuous tangle. No two scholars agree with each other on its definition. They, therefore, face “a formidable challenge to any attempt at exactness” (Faulkner ix). However, despite its bewildering interpretations, scholars, bearing the brunt of its fuzziness, are always tempted and rather compelled to define, explain, analyze, and criticize as to what modernism is, because it necessitates conceiving its connotations to enter in scholarly terrain and discourse. It would be very useful, therefore, if we could come to at least some agreed understanding of this term.

It is highly tough task to define modernism. However, it can be, broadly speaking, defined as an enormous change in all walks of life, thoughts, in all disciplines, in all forms of arts, in culture, science, literature, music, and social and political sciences between the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. This deep change is reflected in the form of a cultural and artistic rupture or discontinuity in the west. In a nutshell, modernism is a deliberate radical break with the traditional western culture, arts, and literature. A scholar has to keep in the mind that modernism has two aspects—cultural modernism and literary modernism. Literary modernism cannot be understood in isolation. It has to situate in the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of the west. In other words, a cultural change, which takes its nomenclature as cultural modernism, gives birth to literary modernism, because it is cultural modernism that paves a ground to create a spirit of literary modernism in the west.

The Dark Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Modernism, and Postmodernism are the currents of cultural and intellectual history in the west, which leaves a seismic impact

on arts and literature. Generally, a scholar begins his talk on modernism directly plunging into literature and he is caught in the whirlpool of a plethora of literary trends and *-isms*, critical jargons, and theoretical gymnastic display. It seems that it is not a desirable way to the understanding of modernism, because it presents a very confusing and blurred picture of modernism in literature and becomes very difficult to understand it. Of course, it cannot be denied that modernism emerges as a dominant artistic and literary movement, but a scholar cannot apprehend this movement unless he makes a serious study of the cumulative factors, which are responsible for creating a spirit of modernism in the western culture. The new social, political, psychological, scientific theories, technological advancement, industrial revolution, urbanization, feminism, introduction of Radio and T.V. in the society, and above all, World War I bring a revolution and rupture in the intellectual field. This break with the past traditional culture gives rise to a cultural matrix, which accounts for creating the concept of a new man, a new consciousness, a new culture, and a new sensibility. It, therefore, warrants me to adumbrate the larger cultural context, the vexing issues, and the corroding problems, which pave a ground to think human life from a quite different angle and influence the entire gamut of knowledge—literature, arts, architecture, sculpture, aesthetics, in the different parts of Europe in different times. Hence, we should, first of all, try to appreciate the concept of modernism in terms of a new culture breaking with the past culture and then relate it to either English literature or to any other branch of knowledge.

No society lives in a pure present. Every society lives in a constant awareness of its past. The past is tied to the present by organic bounds, and is invariably related to the existing thoughts of given age which constitutes its meaning. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot also enunciates his thesis that historic tradition or consciousness has an organic order. Intellectual periods tend to be influenced and shaped by the periods that precede them.

In this respect, modernism is no different. The tradition of the western intellectual movements—the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment—are organically related to modernism. When it is said that modernism is a radical and deliberate break with the traditional western culture, immediately a question crops up as to what the traditional western culture is, which encounters challenges and rejection of the modern world, bringing a change and discontinuity in the current of western culture. The traditional western culture that precedes modernism is called the Enlightenment. Hence, before I should take my debate further on modernism, I must discuss the main characteristics of the Enlightenment which have a direct and enormous impact on and relation with modernism.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is a tremendously broad and ambitious intellectual, philosophical, cultural, and social movement that spread through England, France, Germany, and other parts of Europe in the late 17-th and the 18-th centuries. Many intellectuals consider that the Enlightenment is a major turning point in the western civilization, which heralds an age of light replacing the Age of Darkness. There is no exact date for the Enlightenment, because it did not suddenly spring up out of nowhere but developed gradually. It died out in the early nineteenth century as Romanticism drew appeal. The “forerunners in science and philosophy included Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and Locke” (Baldick 69). The core ideas of the Enlightenment were reason, individualism, skepticism, scientific methods, technology, and empiricism. The Enlightenment thinkers believe in “natural rights”—life, liberty, and property—and promote such ideas as freedom of thought, progress, religious tolerance, constitutional government, and separation of the church from the state. They also believed that human reason and rationality can solve any problem to create better societies and better

people to establish peace, prosperity, progress, and happiness. The Enlightenment is also called the Age of Reason. During this period, man began to use his reason to discover truth about the world, human institutions, religion, and politics to improve the lives of mankind. He displayed courage to cast off superstitions, accepted dogmas, blind faith, and fear of the medieval world and put all the disciplines and subjects to rational scrutiny. The effort to discover the natural laws which governed the universe led to scientific, political, and social advances. Many writers and scientists began to argue that science and reason were more important than religion and tradition. They questioned accepted knowledge and logically spread new ideas about openness, investigation, rationalism, progressivism, and cosmopolitanism.

In religion, the Enlightenment developed skeptical rejection of institutionalized church, supernatural occurrences, religious dogmas, scriptures, superstitions, bigotry, and revealed knowledge. It spurred atheism and gave rise to deism. Deism is a belief that God does exist and has created the universe, but once the universe is created, it functions according to the natural laws, and God neither interferes nor interacts with the universe supernaturally. It is just like a relation between a clock and a clock-maker. Once a clock is made, it functions mechanically without any interference of the clock-maker. The Enlightenment thinkers offer a rational account of the universe like Newton's mechanical universe. For him the universe was a machine. They tried to claim that God was knowable through reason. They typically rejected 'blind faith' and wanted proof before believing anything. This is exemplified by Rene Descartes, who, in searching for proof of his own existence, famously said 'I think, therefore, I am.' This applied to all spheres of life.

To assert the primacy of reason meant to turn away from the essence of religion: faith. It meant a decisive break with the Christian world view, which placed doctrine at the centre of intellectual activity. For centuries the intellectual mentors of Western civilization had been urging man to submit to

what he could know least—the divine. The philosophers hoped to change this completely (Chambers, Crew. et al. 620).

The erosion of revealed religion was the hallmark of the Enlightenment. It engendered secularism and demystified the universe.

In political philosophy, the Enlightenment thinkers attacked feudalism and monarchical absolutism. They talked secular, pluralistic and political liberalism with an emphasis on individual right and freedom. None of this was really available in the Renaissance. The intellectuals questioned the divine right theory of kinship. According to this theory, monarch derived his right and authority to rule directly from the will of God, not from the consent of the people. He would not, therefore, be accountable for their actions by an earthly authority such as a parliament. Actually this was the fancy way of saying that the king was above the law and was not subject to the laws of ordinary man. Thus, the ruled were not citizens but subjects.

It was the medieval conception that God awards temporal power to political ruler and the spiritual power to the church. This notion had been popular among Catholics for centuries. But with the advent of the Enlightenment this idea began to lose its credibility. In this connection, David Harvey writes aptly:

The scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of natural calamity. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of the power as well as from the dark side of our own human natures. Only through such a project could be the universal, eternal, and the immutable qualities of all of humanity be revealed (1989:12).

It is also to be noted here that the Enlightenment would have not possible without the Renaissance and the Reformation. The seeds of discovery and knowledge, reason and logic were already sown in the Renaissance, igniting the ideas of the Age of Exploration, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and finally the bloom of the Enlightenment and the

Industrial Revolution. In this way, it can be said that the Enlightenment is an extension of the Renaissance. But there is also a difference between these two significant movements. The Renaissance is a cultural movement, lending huge contribution to many disciplines, mostly to arts like music, visual painting, architecture, poetry, drama, philosophy, and astronomy. On the whole, it was on the artistic side of human life, while the Enlightenment on the intellectual side. The Renaissance was mainly centered on ancient wisdom, freedom of thought freedom of religion, education, and literacy, seeking validation in the texts of the Greco-Roman philosophers, but the Enlightenment thinkers stood more solidly on the plinth of rationality, empiricism, scientific method, industrialization, Astronomy, and calculus. The Renaissance stressed the importance of the power and potential of human dignity, individual talents, humanism, and the glorification of humanity. The Renaissance concept of man was that man is the architect of his own destiny; he can raise himself up to the level of an angel because he is gifted with immense potential and infinite power. But the Enlightenment undermined this uniqueness of man in the overall scheme of things and held man a simply limited being. The humanist root of the Enlightenment is found in the Renaissance. However, many of the ideas of these two movements overlap each other.

To put the debate trenchantly in a nut-shell, it can be said that the Enlightenment is an extension of the Renaissance, laying emphasis on logic, reason, progress, and the universal values of science. The crux of the Enlightenment is concretized in the words of Voltaire's "smash the system" and Horace's "desire to use your reason." The Enlightenment thinkers are quite confident that progress can only be achieved through the exercise of the rational and scientific methods and man can liberate himself from those forces and myths, which keep him from progressing. It is also felt that entire humanity would eventually free itself from misery, religion, superstition, all irrational behavior and unfounded belief; and would thus

lead toward a state of freedom, happiness, and progress. These values in the ideal of science and progress or in Christian religion are the centre and anchor for the Europeans.

However, the Enlightenment enjoying its vigorous excitement of rationality for almost one and half centuries comes to end by the beginning of the early decades of the nineteenth century. All of its attributes claiming as panacea to solve all human problems suffer a serious set-back by new emerging intellectual waves, new theories, a new horizon of knowledge, numerous-isms and innovations, and the World War I. Now all the established traditional cultural values start crumbling; as they are subject to rigorous scrutiny, criticism, and skepticism. The whole of the nineteenth century, witnessing a series of intellectual development, can be regarded as the incubation period of modernism. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, a change and crisis can be observed in all the spheres of life and disciplines. Thinker after thinker appears on the intellectual landscape with an explosion of knowledge, altering the basic interpretations of 'reality.' People start believing that they are living at the beginning of a new era, and thus develop new ways of understanding man, society, religion, and the physical universe.

Theory of Class-Conflict

One of the great revolutionary heroes in the later part of the nineteenth century who appears on the European intellectual horizon is Karl Marx (1818-1883). Highly critical of religion and the luxurious life of the upper-class, he presents, for the first time, the concept of man and society with his scientific theory of class-conflict. Establishing an economic theory of history, he believes that it is the economic means of production in society that creates and controls all human institutions and ideologies—education, religion, politics, arts, literature, certain beliefs and ideas. The capital is the driving force of every event in the society, which determines the nature of human reality, too. Marx contends that human history is the history of class-

struggle. Throughout history, there has been a conflict between the exploiter and the exploited; though the nature of exploitation varies from one historic phase to another. During his own times, Marx studies European society deeply and arrives at this conclusion that society has progressed from one economic system to another—from feudalism to capitalism. After the Industrial Revolution in 1750, Marx finds that European society has become a capitalist society and that there are two classes of people in it—the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. The bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production, the factories, and businesses. They take profit and control the capital. On the other hand, the proletariats are the workers who sell their labour to survive and produce wealth for the owners of factories. There is always a conflict between the capitalist class and the working class in the society. In his *Das Kapital*, Marx visualizes that a day will come when the proletariats take an equal part in the economic system, and class-conflict will come to end.

Marx registers his deep concern that “the laws of motion of capitalist society” breed a sense of alienation in the working class. Capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, rise of urban living, communication, transport, production, rise of the bourgeoisie, and technological innovations give birth to an exploitation of the newly born proletariat class which experiences a loss of communal identity and a pang of alienation. Marx believes that capitalist society creates three types of alienation—(i) the worker is alienated from what he produces; (ii) the worker is alienated when he is not working and (iii) people are alienated from each other in capitalist society because it is a competitive society in which people stand in opposition to other people.

Alienation is the hallmark of capitalist society. Prior to Marx, the vision of human society was organic and the individuals were not only essential to society but also integrated and organic part of the society. It was associated with religious beliefs, race, hero-worship,

and utopian dreams. The central feature of organic society was that all human relations, specially economic and political, were in some sense personal and characterized by a strong emotional attachment to the fellow people. Therefore, the romantic aesthetes used the term ‘organic society’ to denote a specific and idealized kind of society. For them organic society was local, rural, and traditional rather than cosmopolitan, urban, and mobile. In organic society, the conception of history had been of something in which individual efforts could sometimes play a crucial part. But over the second half of the nineteenth century, the vision of organic society eroded. In the three volumes of *Das Kapital* (1867, 1884, and 1894), Marx explains that after the Industrial Revolution, man is nothing but a cog in the machine. Capitalism, a bane for human beings, has made man dehumanized, alienated, and powerless. In capitalism, there is no image of free man, but he is totally governed by economic theory of capitalism.

The impact of Marx’s theory of class-conflict is striking, enduring and far-reaching, and marks a radical break with the past in the nature of the western culture. Childs rightly observes:

An understanding of the nineteenth century shifts from country to city, land to factory, individual to mass production, can best be arrived at in terms of the influence of Marx’s analysis of history, politics, and society. Modernism has repeatedly been characterised a literature of crisis and it is Marx who places crisis at the centre of capitalist development (2000:28).

Capitalist society creates a crisis of literature that grows out of a loss of communal community. Modernist writers attempt to represent alienated urban living, fragmentation, defamiliarization, and disaffection. Marx, therefore, advocates bringing an end of these social evils by overthrowing the capitalist class and establishing communist society. He offers his vision of classless society, because he discovers that classes in society are cause of conflict.

Therefore, no classes, no struggle. It is true that capitalism and bourgeoisie eliminate feudalism, but at the same time beget a new class i.e. the proletariat class.

Theory of Evolution

Throughout the nineteenth century, the rationalism of science and philosophy attacked the validity of religious faith, but it was Charles Darwin (1809-1882), who brought a great havoc to the Christian world with his theory of evolution, overthrowing the old cultural and intellectual order. His two provocative books—*On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871)—spurred an intense debate on the origin and history of man and the traditional belief in God, shaping the thinking of successive historic periods. In other words, he developed a new narrative of humanity, religion, God, and a new view of anthropocentrism. Before Darwin, man had full faith in God's design that He created the world and different species of organisms at a particular time on Sunday about four thousand years before Christ. It was also believed that different species of living beings had been born as such and God had made man in heaven in his image.

Darwin rejected all supernatural phenomena in the rise of human species and emphasized nature being a product of chance rather a design. He proved that nature was not innocent and harmonious as it had ever been considered. He argued that in nature there was a perpetual struggle among all organisms for their survival, where the strong would survive and the weak die away. There was no morality in nature. Only the ruthless forces existed, no rational thought and spiritual presence were noticed. Nature was not static, nor moving towards in a linear direction, leading to a final judgment day, but it was always in a dynamic state in a cyclic movement in which production and survival of the fittest were recognized. Darwin also tried to prove that human beings were driven by the same impulses as 'lower animals.' In a nut-shell, his theory claimed that man was not a creation of God, but a more

evolved form of animals. Man is not a fallen prophet, but a risen ape. “Humans were closer to animals than to God...” (Childs 36). With this fatal change of the concept of man, church received a severe blow and stopped playing a curative and consoling role to human mind. There prevailed doubts and skepticism about the account of the sacrosanct Bible. The evolutionary theory undermined the religious certainty of the general public, the sense of human intellectual uniqueness, the pride and dignity of human beings, and the idea of ennobling spirituality.

Darwin’s evolutionary theory gives birth to social Darwinism, which believed in “the survival of the fittest.” Darwinism states that the strongest or the fittest should survive, flourish, and become powerful in society; because they are innately better, whereas the weak and unfit should be allowed to die. Over the years, social Darwinism is used to justify colonialism, imperialism, racism, and political conservatism. All these exploits question the validity of their moral values today. Colonialism is one of them, which is seen as natural and inevitable, and given justification that natives are weaker and more unfit to survive and, therefore, they should be ruled and their land and resources be seized. Social Darwinism also gives rise to dictatorship, fascism, and military actions. It is justified that the military would defeat and kill the enemy and would, therefore, be the most fit. On the other hand, casualties on the opponent side would be held as the natural result of their unfit status. Through social Darwinism, the brutal colonial governments gain impetus to exercise tyrannical tactics against their subjects. It also encourages to more exploitative form of capitalism in which workers are paid less for long hours of hard labour. Big business men adopts a frustrating gesture against labour unions and similar other organization, giving an implication that the rich need not donate to the poor or less fortunate, since such people were less fit anyway. This radical definition of reality proves a peculiarity in cultural history that challenges the

existing attitudes and values, whose impact is deeply felt in modernist writing as well as in the social and political aspects of life.

Theory of Psychoanalysis

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung brought a decided upheaval in the discipline of psychology. They were not concerned with its traditional areas, but made the life of mind the central focus, dealing with the unresolved emotional problems. They tried to demonstrate that the power and significance of the unconscious dimension of human mind is more important than that of the conscious mind. Prior to Freud, the Enlightenment specifies that man is inherently good and the western concept of human mind, human action, human behavior, and human personality were based on the possibility of self-knowledge, presence of mind, the conscious state of mind. But Freud toppled these traditional concepts through the magical wand of his theory of psychoanalysis in one go. His *Interpretation of Dream* (1900), *The Psychology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Ego and Id* (1923), and other works greatly undermined the power and dimension of the conscious human mind. In this respect Freud, changing the concept of human personality, is the Columbus to the psychology of the unconscious mind. Crichton-Miller also compares Freud to Newton (1939:7).

Freud divides human mind into three levels of awareness—the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. These three psychological components interact with one another and operate to determine and define human behaviour and personality. He compares human mind to an iceberg in which the smaller part floating above the surface represents the region of the conscious, whereas the much larger mass hidden in the water represents the region of unconsciousness. *First*, the conscious mind, Freud observes, is in general “a highly fugitive condition. What is conscious is conscious only for a moment” (1949:57). The

conscious mind contains all the thoughts, memories, feelings, and wishes of which we are aware at any given moment. *Secondly*, the preconscious state of mind refers to that state of mind when mind is not working actively at a particular moment but its thoughts can be recalled through memories easily and they become readily available at the conscious level. For example, one may not be conscious of his address, but it can be readily available to the conscious mind when asked or given the right trigger. Freud uses this term to make clear that the whole of the repressed thoughts are not always rooted at the unconscious level. Some of the repressed thoughts which can be easily brought to the surface of the conscious mind exist on the preconscious level. *Thirdly*, perhaps the most significant contribution Freud has made to modern thought is his conception of the unconscious. In this vast region of the unconscious, the repressed thoughts, ideas, urges, passions, feelings, and memories are deeply embedded in the mind, which are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unpleasant or unacceptable such as feelings of pain, anxiety, sorrow, and conflict, which continue to influence our behaviour and experience even though we are unaware of these underlying influences. The unconscious thoughts are repressed to that extent that one cannot remember them without extreme effort and specialized help. To be more precise, it was a general belief that the conscious is reality and man's behavior is controlled by the conscious state of the mind, but, according to Freud, it is not true. Reality is hidden beneath the surface of the conscious. In this way, the power of unconscious is replaced by that of the unconscious.

The three conflicting psychological forces—the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious—correspond and overlap with Freud's another tripartite theory of the *id*, the *ego*, and the *super-ego*. The total healthy and balanced human mind and personality is based on the synthesis and harmonious organization of this fundamental *id-ego-super-ego* structure.

In other words, human personality is formed through conflicts among these three fundamental parts of the human mind. The *id* is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind. It is the seat of all desires and wants. Based on the pleasure principle, this primal force contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories, and wants whatever feels good at the time without any consideration for the reality of the situation. The *id* is that component of human mind which is made up of unconscious psychic energy demanding immediate gratification of basic urges, needs, and desires. Freud argues that the region of the *id* is “a dark inaccessible part of human personality; it is primitive and irrational;” it is “a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement;” it “knows no values, no good and evil, no morality” (1933:104). The only real way to observe this impulsive part of our personality, Freud suggests, is to study the contents of dreams and neurotic behavioral clues.

The *super-ego* is a judgmental, ethical, and morally correct component of the personality, operating as a moral conscience. The *super-ego* acts to perfect and civilize our behaviour and suppresses all unacceptable urges of the *id* and struggles to make the *ego* act upon ideal standards rather than on realistic principles. In other words, the *super-ego* is a prohibitive socialized force—an inhibitive form of a person’s moral standard. The *ego* is a conscious and realistic part of our personality that negotiates or reconciles between the desires of the *id* and the *super-ego* that makes decision. The *ego* is a rational faculty caught in a psychic battle. Thus, the *id* is a primitive force, the *ego* is an executive force, and the *super-ego* is a legislative force. The *id-ego-super-ego* interaction represents Freud’s structural model of the psyche that describes the activities of the mental life of a person. Human psyche structured thus develops at different stages in life.

Freud’s psychosexual development of human personality from early childhood to adulthood through five distinct stages demolishes the pious relationship between mother and

son and daughter and father, giving a smashing jolt to the conscious mind. Man gets befuddled and loses faith in the homogenous and compact mental life and finally in himself. He discovers that the ultimate driving factor of mental life is libido—the sexual energy and aggressive instincts. The important thing is that events in our childhood—during the phallic stage—have a great influence on our adult lives, shaping our behavior. The unconscious leaves a profound impact on how we think about thinking, how we think about reality, and how we conceive of our ‘selves.’ Thus, things are not as they appear. Freud finds human psychic landscape dotted with numerous conflicts raging ceaselessly, which has more than one aspect. Our true selves exist on different unknowable planes, however active and unconscious our ‘selves’ are. The truth, therefore, exists below the surface of the conscious and it is not readily empirically observable.

According to Freud, maladjustment among the three causes abnormality in human behaviours. If *id* dominates *ego*, it leads to psychosis, and if *super-ego*, neurosis results. To achieve a normal mental life, there must be a well-balanced *ego*. Thus, the concept of reality undergoes a sea-change in modern psychology, which proves that there is not a unitary normative self to which every individual thinks that he conforms. Reality only exists only in subjective apprehension and it is the past events that shape the human psyche. William James, an American psychologist, compares consciousness to a stream—unbroken and continuous flow despite constant shifts and changes. Human psyche is a stream of consciousness; it is full of hidden meanings, haphazard events, disjointed thoughts or ideas. For example, in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, the waste lander’s mental life is compressed of ‘memory’ and ‘desire’: the past and the future organized in the individual mind in the present.

These Freudian findings and principles open a new vista of introspection. Writers and artists felt the traditional psychology of consciousness is wholly inadequate for understanding

the underlying motives of human behaviour. They incorporate the psychological theories into their works. There takes place a cross-breeding between literature and psychology. A number of modern artists—Virginia Woolf, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Dorothy Richardson—knock down the traditional method i.e. realism, portraying surface reality of mind, or the external delineation of the character. Instead, Henry James's 'psychological realism'—a new tool is handled to unearth the real workings of human mind.

Will to Power

There is no absolute standard of good and evil in a godless and absurd world. Man himself is responsible for his rise and fall. Michael Novak rightly points out:

It would be regarded as 'cultural imperialism' to suggest that only one form of reasoning is valid in all matters. It would be naïve to believe that the content of human experiencing, imagining, understanding, judging, and deciding were everywhere the same (1988: 774).

Nietzsche (1844-1900), therefore, rejects the whole western metaphysical tradition right from Socrates, condemns Christian morality of almost two thousand years, and disapproves progress through reason of the Enlightenment—the main characteristic of the western intellectual tradition of the last two hundred years.

Nietzsche violently shakes the entire European intellectual complacency, confidence, and conviction to shock it with his rhetorical prowess and provocation. For him, all is not right and wrapped with a sunny spirit, but doubts and disorientations, naivety and nihilism prevail everywhere in religion, metaphysics, philosophy, culture, morality, and society. He prophesies that "the whole of our European morality" is destined for "collapse," and to mourn deeply, because it is psychologically damaging, baseless, and pernicious. Making a ruthless investigation in all values and systems, he dismantles and then reconstructs them in a new form, stripping off the veneer of unquestionable authority. Nietzsche's negative wide-

ranging critique aims to undermine not only religious faith or philosophical moral theory, but also many central aspects of ordinary moral consciousness. Highly critical to altruistic concern—guilt of wrongdoing, moral responsibility, the value of compassion, the demand for equality and so on—he brushes aside all these things.

Nietzsche revolutionizes modern culture through his philosophy of instinct and will to power. It is the power one needs to overcome one's own self. It is an essence of life, an inner struggle, a main driving force, a powerful creative self in all individuals, which spurs the human existence to have some achievement in life. In Nietzsche's view, will to power is a huge reservoir of positive energy ingrained in the individual propelling him to move forward and conquering himself to achieve the highest self. The will to power is an irrational force, which motivates one to achieve something great in life to concretize one's own aim. Hence, human action is based on one's will to power, not to some supernatural universal principle. The aim of Nietzsche's will to power is the production of the 'Superman'—the real man who can exhibit his will to power to the highest possible degree.

A big skeptic, one of the most influential post-Hegelian German philosophers of the nineteenth century, he argues that all the claims of the Enlightenment about civilization, reason, and morality have come to fiasco in the end. His uncompromising criticism rejects many religious and metaphysical assumptions of the west, and the life-denying Christian moral principles. He values human emotions, passions, instincts, impulses, and self-will, and underestimates the power of reason and rationality of the Enlightenment. He disregards the liberal notion that man is inherently good and exposes that life is full of cruelty, injustice, uncertainty, and absurdity. Man has never lost the instinct of cruelty; he has only refined it. Nietzsche lays emphasis that aggression, will, and power are the most important human instincts. Modern industrial society and Christian morality have made man a victim of the

excessive rational faculty at the cost of human will and instincts. Fascinated by the Greek way of life, he undermines the Christian one, expressing his deep dissatisfaction at the western civilization. Man, Nietzsche holds, must recognize the dark and mysterious world of instincts—the true life force. Excessive rationality, he thinks, smoothers the spontaneity necessary for creativity. To realize his potential, man must develop his instinct, drive, and will, instead of depending on reason and intellect. Nietzsche tries to foreground the limitations of pure reason of man on which most of the philosophers of modernity have banked upon. He holds that there is no higher world, no morality derived from God or Nature, because “God is dead.” He offers new values to promote cultural renewal and improve social and psychological life, exposing the false consciousness, which has infected the received ideas of the people for the last two thousand years.

Nietzsche becomes one of the foremost philosophers who criticizes those principles on which Christian and the western philosophical tradition are founded. His framework of thought is original and shocking because, for the first time, it offers the critique of some institutions, philosophical traditions, and epistemological concepts. He makes a marked departure from the epistemological approach and starts a fundamental phenomenon—“Existence”—his new interpretation of existence. He says that the old philosophizing has come to an end and new philosophizing is beginning. Creating a spirit of the cultural break with the past, he paves a ground for the very complex and confusing, but momentous movement—modernism.

Like Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), also attacked the fundamental world view of the Enlightenment. He viewed man as innately depraved, irrational, and rebellious. For Dostoevsky, the world is horrible place of naked wills; all engaged in conflicts with one another. In his novella, *Notes from the Undergrounds* (1864), the protagonist rebels

all plans and schemes for social improvement. For him there is no absolute, universal, or timeless truths to which all men ought to conform. All the characters in this novella assert their individuality in their irrational impulses and acts, reacting against the culturally constructed system.

Theory of Duree

It has been a perennial problem to know the nature of ‘reality’ from ancient Greek period till today. Reality is always awash with controversies. Western history of philosophy, right from the beginning, is dominated by intellect, reason, and rationality. It regards that reality can be known through reason—a supreme source of knowledge. The entire range of philosophical ideas is sought to be structured in terms of scientific rationality. That is why reason occupies a paramount position in western philosophy of thought. However, we also encounter a number of other philosophers and thinkers who think that the exact nature of reality can be apprehended only through intuition.

Certainly the most influential thinker of the early decades of the twentieth century is Henry Bergson (1859-1941), who holds a unique position in the history of modernism. He lays emphasis on intuition and human freedom. He accords intuition as the highest kind of knowledge to know reality, trying to project human intuition superior to intellect. His philosophical issues can be seen as part of the modernist reaction to the tyranny of the clock. The Enlightenment places the supremacy of intellect over other aspects of human intelligence, but Bergson reversed that thinking. He argues that processes of immediate experience and intuition are more significant than abstract rationalism and science for understanding reality. Bergson recognizes the narrow range of discursive thought and science with its determinism and mechanism. On the other hand, the phenomena of life, consciousness, and human freedom can only be known in immediate intuition. In his *Matter*

and Memory (1898) and *Creative Evolution* (1907), he offers a new theory of human consciousness by integrating biological science and psychology. He supports the idea that time is mind-dependent and real time exists merely in our consciousness. Peter Childs observes:

Bergson's conviction that experience is understood by intuition rather than rational reflection combined with Freud's belief that past events shape the psyche, resulted in the view that reality only exists in subjective apprehensions becoming wide spread in artistic circles (2000:50).

In *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson presents the theory of 'duree' or 'duration.' He divides time into two categories—(1) time in ordinary sense or chronological time or the mechanistic time of science. Chronological time is the scientific concept of time. It is divided into equal intervals and measured by clocks. It is conceived as running in a linear line on which three points are fixed to designate past, present, and future. This concept of time tells that past is dead, that future lies ahead, and that present is all that is important. Bergson is aware that the moment one attempts to measure a moment, it would be gone. One measures an immobile, complete line, whereas time is mobile and incomplete. He deduces the limitation of the chronological time measured by clocks.

Bergson offers the second category of time, which is called 'real time' or 'real duration.' We actually experience it—lived time, where every moment is unique. Bergson tries to explore the inner life of man, which is a kind of duration. It has neither a unity nor qualitative multiplicity. Duration is ineffable and can only be shown indirectly through images that never reveal a complete picture. It can be grasped through a simple intuition of imagination. Real time is psychological time which is significant and unique to an individual. It has its lasting and continuous character. Bergson writes that *duration* is

...the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future...the past is preserved by itself automatically...all that we have felt, thought, and willed

from our earliest fancy is there, leaning over the present which is about to join it, pressing against the portal of consciousness that would fain leave it outside (1911:5-6).

Real time or duration is the flux of consciousness in which sensations, feelings, volitions and ideas follow like a stream. Bergson says: “The truth is that the state (i.e. the state of mind) itself is nothing but change” (1911:2). Bergson undermines the Aristotelian concept of linearity of time—the beginning, the middle, and the end. Frank Thilly states: “Reality is in part, the flux of our sensations coming we know not whence: partly, the relations that obtain between our sensations; and partly, the previous truths” (1965:641).

Virginia Woolf flouts the conventional narrative techniques, character portrayal, self-referentiality, and linearity; and introduced time-shifts, flashbacks, and juxtapositions of events. In her essay entitled “Modern Fiction” (1919), she is least interested in painting the external surroundings, family, home, job, and town. She penetrates into the characters’ mind to present a plethora of thoughts, memories, desires, fantasy, fleeting impressions, erratic behavior, and varying motives. “From all sides, they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms.” Woolf writes: “Life is not is a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” She is sure that “The literary convention of time is so different...that, naturally, the feeble are tempted to outrage and the strong are led to destroy the very foundation and rules of literary society.”

Cyclic theory of History

In the changing western culture, the concept of history, varying thinker to thinker, undergoes a radical change in the hands of modernists. Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity brings a great revolution in the meaning of time. The highlights of the new discovery are that there is no continuity, solidity, or causality in Nature, that matter has no substance, and that time and

space are not distinct entities. This gives rise to a concept of time which has been accepted by many a poet and novelist. It simply means that the division of Time into Past, Present, and Future is artificial because it is the present itself which is real and in all the moments of the past and all the moments called future meet, blend, and have their being. This is known as 'Isness' of time, and has found full support in the theory of Bergson's 'duration.' Thus, time is considered as a continuum—past, present, and future are viewed as a continuing whole.

Equally important is Giambattista Vico's cyclic theory of history. He views history as a cycle. In one cycle, the civilization gets through a number of definite stages—birth, rise, decay, and death, and again starts from the primitive stage. The movement of history, thus, is circular rather linear. That is why modernists do not believe that humanity is progressing towards a millennium. Instead they visualize the imminent danger looming over the new dark of barbarianism and vulgarity, as the World Wars bring in their trail. It is the duty of modern man to protect the cultural and spiritual integration of the commercialized world. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot depicts the moral chaos and spiritual sterility and disintegration of the modern civilization. Vico's cyclic theory of history finds full support in the thesis of Oswald Spengler. In his *The Decline of the West*, he believes that each phase of history is about two thousand years in duration. During this period, birth, bloom, and death of one type of civilization are inevitable. The decay of civilization means the beginning of another civilization. Yeats believes that Christian civilization is almost at the end of its allotted span and a new Annunciation is at hand. This is the subject matter of his "Second Coming" (1921) with its terrible symbolism of new energy moving toward the point of its explosive epiphany. It was written when Europe was in the grip of violent change and the end of civilization to be at hand.

Revolution in Science and Technology

Einstein also published his Special Theory of Relativity (1905) with its model of three-dimensional space-time continuum. He propounds the principle of subject-object relationship. He says that every observer makes a subjective picture of an object he sees. Pictures taken by different observers at the same time and from the same point of space will not be identical unless the observer also moves with the same speed. Hence it is impossible to conceive of a precise picture of any object because the observer and the object are joined together in an observation. And the picture of an object presented by an observer will always be subjective.

In science the most striking case is physics. In its great achievements of this century are Wilhelm Roentgen's discovery of X-rays, Henry Becquerel's discovery of the radioactive properties of uranium, and the Marie Curie's radium. In 1887 J. J. Thomson discovered the existence of separate components which he named electrons in the structure of the invisible atom. In 1902 Frederick Soddy and Ernest Rutherford presented a paper on the cause and nature of radioactivity. In 1912 Rutherford presented a revolutionary model of the atom that it has positively charged nucleus having most of the mass of the atom, around which the electrons moved in orbit like the planets round the sun. In 1913 there was also a reformulation of Max Planck's quantum theory of energy. These theories shattered the established theory of Physics. Thus, in the twenty years between 1895 and 1915, the entire face of physical universe gets changed and is replaced by the new models.

The Zeitgeist of the Particular Period

The close of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century were confronted with the rapid development of technology, the dehumanizing effect of machine and mechanization of industries, the expansion of the international economy, a great increase of urban population, economic breakdown, mass civilization, isolating and cramping city, and unbearable gigantic organization. "This was the shape of twentieth century European and American society:

urbanized, industrialized, mechanized, its life shaped to the routine of factory or office” (Bullock 1976:59-60). It was a society of mass production. Success in business was the only norm in America. That is why a general proverb was very much in currency that the business of America was business. The subtle scientific explanations and a host of facts and factors were responsible to give a smashing jolt to the general consensus of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, or the orderly and complacent world that had been presented to the reader in Victorian literature. G.H. Bantock remarks: “In the social sphere increasing knowledge tended only to confirm and strengthen imitations of moral ease and to destroy faith in the essential and unquestioned rightness of the Western ways of behavior” (1961:22). In *Kangaroo*, D.H. Lawrence also categorically spells out that there was a general lack of direction and aim:

It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-16 the spirit of the old London collapsed; the city, in some way, perished from being the heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. The integrity of London collapsed and the genuine debasement began, the unspeakable baseness of press and public voice, the reign of the bloated ignominy, John Bull.... The well-bred, really cultured classes were on the whole passive registers. They shirked their duty (1961:21).

Human readjustment and reshuffling was required. It is clear that one by one the foundations of an earlier understanding of the nature and place of humanity were so shaken that many artists and writers throughout the Western world had developed a kind of ‘future-shock.’ Man’s understanding of himself got changed; fresh ways of looking at his position and function in the universe started. People were alienated from all community. Virginia Woolf observed:

On or about December 1910 human nature changed.... All human relation shifted between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature (1966:321).

It was a period of cultural bankruptcy; a period of tension between past and present; a period of lost orientation, new manners, self-conscious fashions, the exploration of new taste, a search for personal identity. The old barriers were collapsing; accepting one's place, loyalty to authority; unquestioning obedience began to break down. Politically there was an increasing challenge to Capital by Labour.

Europe remained a society governed by class distinction, with undisguised inequality between rich and poor. The difference between the leisured and the working classes found expression not simply in their clothes, their food, their housing and their education, but in their physical appearance and mentality. The poor who thronged the overcrowded slums of the big cities were a lower order of humanity, and treated as such, valued only as the vast pool of surplus labour on which the social as well as the economic system depended (Bullock1976:61).

Europe had a complete political and economic dominance over the world. This was also the age of imperialism. It was based not only on the material prosperity, but on the cultural and racial superiority of the white races of European stock. Alan Bullock remarks: "The British empire in 1900 covered one quarter of the surface of the globe and numbered 400 million people. London was the imperial Capital *par excellence*" (1976: 60).

With the growing economic independence, no one was ready to accept a completely subordinate role in the more open, flexible, and democratic situation. Moral loss, spiritual sterility, divorce, scandal, drug-addiction, murders, suicide, and faithlessness were widespread. Love, compassion, and affection had been replaced by jealousy, abomination, and ruthlessness. The whole series of generation was infected with the spirit of capitalism and materialism. "The atmosphere was charged with glamour and pleasure; wealth and wine: Cities became bigger, buildings taller, roads longer, fortune greater, automobiles faster, college larger, night-club gayer..." (Nevins & Commager 1968:466), but skirt became shorter and shorter and crimes more and more. Family relations were snapped; the relation between wife and husband had turned a mechanical link instead of an emotional attachment.

Sex had thrown other values into the background. Women were crazy for wearing topless garments to reveal maximum part of their body. Girls preferred promiscuous sexual relationship and became professional prostitutes. The aunts and unmarried daughters were leaving the shelters of the family roof. Home became less interesting: restaurant, movies, theatre, and the office chief resorts. Of women, F.L. Allen remarks:

... the quest of slenderness, the flattening of the breasts, the vogue of short skirt were signs that consciously or unconsciously, the women of this decade worshipped not merely youth: they wanted to be... men's casual and light-hearted companion; not broad-hipped mothers of the race, but irresponsible playmates (1931:108).

On the intellectual plane, the impact of wireless, cinema, radio and television was to create a day-dreaming, an escapist attitude, or premature consciousness. D. H. Lawrence observes its moral dilemma:

The girl who is going to fall in love knows all about it beforehand from books and movies.... She knows exactly how she feels when her lover or husband betrays her when she betrays him: she knows precisely what it is to be a shaken wife, an adorning mother, an erratic grandmother. All at the age of eighteen (quoted in *Modern Age*, 40).

In the big cosmopolitan town, life, in a corporate anonymity, became a challenge—economically and spiritually. The contemporary man found himself lonely, thrown, and cut off from his own surroundings by artificial barriers—as the boss cut off from his employees, the rich from the poor, and wife from her husband. Reacting to the mechanical and abstract basis of community relationship, D.H. Lawrence thinks that talking to modern man is “like trying to have a human relationship with letter K in algebra” (cited in *Modern Age* 32). The zooming scientific rise had stripped off the freedom, values, and respect of man.

Feminist Turbulence

Social turbulence brought about by feminist movement opened a new front for rulers. Women achieved greater consciousness to improve their condition and status. In western culture,

down the ages, the concept of woman and her body was inscribed in negative gesture. Western scholars, philosophers, and anthropologists made difference between man and women on the ground of separate and distinct physiological structures. Trapped in social taboos, personal inhibitions, and inferiority complex, they could never realize the worth of female biology. But in the nineteenth century onward women were no more satisfied with their life of home and hearth, because they were joining hands with men in mills and factories and offices. They demanded equal political status with men, equal pay, equal work, equal morality, and equal sexual freedom. Members of the Women's Freedom League formed in 1908 interrupted political meeting, broke windows, and chained to railings the members of the political parties. They indulged in "arson, false fire-arms, cutting telephone wires, slashing pictures in public galleries, and throwing bombs." The feminist reaction went to such an extent that it took a very ugly shape in America. However, the English government passed the representation of the People Act in 1918 granting the right to vote to all women over thirty of age.

The Catastrophe of World War I

Of all the shocking events taken place in modern Europe, The First World War from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918 was the most catastrophic phenomenon, which witnessed unprecedented levels of carnage and genocide. Entire Europe had turned into a volcano. Andrew Sanders observes: "what humanity can endure and suffer is beyond belief" (1996: 505). The broken heads and dismembered bodies, the ruined cities and shattered hearth were the naked external symbols of utter disintegration of the entire cultural structure. This global war of destruction brought a great havoc with a chain of rebellious attitude affecting all the spheres of social, religious, political, and individual life. This engendered a sense of

disillusionment, angst, ennui, passivity, and nihilism. Dowling gives details of human wreckage authentically:

Over the course of the war, medical officers treated 80000 shell-shocked soldiers, and in the 1920s there were 114000 pension applications related to war trauma. By 1932, psychiatric casualties accounted for 36 percent of veterans receiving disability pensions (1991:89).

The artists were deeply anguished with the war, which shook the very foundation of the western culture. The war confirmed that the technological advance and the primacy of reason over feeling had to pay a heavy loss to the modern civilization. They were quite confirmed that there was in way or the other a great flaw in the social, political, economic and religious system that caused such an irreparable disaster. The myth of progress shattered to pieces. Modernist texts—Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*—mirror the war-ridden Europe in its full fragmentation, cultural crises, chaos, alienation, and neurosis. The traditional hero-worship of the soldier coming back from the battle-field with victory receives a smashing jolt. Childs states: “The war to which so many men had gone in the hope of becoming heroes ended up emasculating them, depriving them of autonomy, confining them as closely as Victorian women had been restricted” (2000:176).

Conclusion

The new dimension of knowledge, new theories, and new values posed a tough challenge to the verity and certainty of the Enlightenment, which had hitherto given support and stability to social system. The new understanding of man, religion, society, physical universe, and the conception of human self shocked the twentieth century western people and forced them to think of and look at life from quite different angles. All the traditional beliefs and established principles appear to be uprooted, like ‘a heap of broken images,’ and are put to scrutiny and severe criticism. Religious faith, social organization, and daily life were becoming out-dated

one by one in the new economic, political, social, psychological, and scientific conditions of the industrialized west. The old ways of explaining and portraying the world no longer seemed appropriate and applicable. There is no absolute truth, because all things are relative. The new knowledge reveals that the world is created in the act of perceiving. A new world order began and the gnawing radical changes took place in western society in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. The foundations of earlier understanding was so badly shaken that man lost faith in religion, politics, economics, morality, humanity, and finally even in himself. He appeared to be totally fused and confused standing at the crucial crossroad as to which way he would follow. This cultural revolution gives birth to alienation, fragmentation, meaninglessness, spiritual bankruptcy, and rootlessness, which beget boredom, and monotony, pessimism and nihilism in human life. There was an urgent need of a power to bind the whole of humanity together, because only the puzzled self and unordered world was the centre. William Butler Yeats epitomized the spirit of the modern age in such words: “Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” This zeitgeist nods a break with the traditional western culture, which is known as cultural modernism and later acquires the status of a multinational movement.

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