

Q.1 Describe the general characteristics of Modern Age. (OR)

Discuss the social, political, and economic and literary tendencies of the 20th Century / the Modern Age / the Age of Interrogation.

[1] Introduction :- For the 20th century literature, A. C. Blaud says : "When the twentieth century opened Tennyson had been dead nine years, and there was an universal impression that English poetry had died with him." He further adds : "The poetry of the period shows a general decline, not in general level of execution but in genius and breadth of range".

After 19th century the English literary scene became terribly chaotic. In every field of literature we find tremendous development. Thousands of poems are written and thousands are published every day. Particularly, the chaos in the field of poetry is due to the fact that in modern times no literary tradition is respected at all. The emphasis is made to fall on individualism whether it was worth or not. The personal sense of direction was dominated and highlighted.

The dawn of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of new values in the field of social, political, economic and literary life. Under these values, Compton-Rickett has pointed three general features of the Age. And all the literary features are involved in the following things.

- (i) The reiteration of the old revolutionary formula of Liberty, Equality & Fraternity in a new setting.
- (ii) Its challenging attitude of the elder values in Art and life this is more persistent, more searching today.
- (iii) Its worship of Power rather than Beauty, here it parts company abruptly with the age of the Romantic Revival and the Victorian age.

[2] The Characteristics of the Modern Age :

- (i) Fall of Tradition :- No great poetry was written in the 20th century. A critic says, "there have been many poetic persons in the 20th century, but no poets."

It is visible that as civilisation advances, poetry declines. At the beginning of the new century, at least, there was no poet of any stature. The level of execution was not proper. So, the range and geniusness were disturbed. There is no great heritage of literary tradition. In the sense, past tradition was totally forgotten and always avoided. General interests and themes had been forgotten, and personal interests and aspects were highlighted. Poetry becomes narrow and artificial, as well as great subjects had totally disappeared.

(ii) Importance of Modernity : → Modern Poetry is known as a great freedom, particularly in the choice of themes. Poets were interested to create beauty anyhow. Modernity and freedom have great relationship. Creating beauty in one's own way was a fashion for some poets. (became) But many were interested in creating ugliness. So, literature was written on pretty but unpromising subjects like horror and gloom. Personal matters and individual concepts were highlighted accordingly. According to T. S. Eliot, "the essential advantage of a poet is not to have beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see horror and beauty."

(iii) Firmness in Realism : From Realism :- The literature and life of the modern age is governed more by realism than by romance. So, the present age is essentially the age of realism. The writers have concentrated their attention to the problems of modern life. The writers have thrown the light on repulsive facts like prostitution, war, slum-dwellers, love, sex, education, fights and scientific advancement. Two global wars took place. And because of that terror, ugliness and brutality etc. became the themes of poetry. The war poets, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen who themselves fought as soldiers. Poet like Rupert

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Brooke has loved war as a test of their valiance and patriotism and they treated in their poetry accordingly. Hatred is visible everywhere in literature.

sudden increase

quickness

The realism of the modern age has further been accentuated by the growing upsurge of scientific discoveries. The new inventions about discoveries have ushered in a transformation in the Old romantic values of life.

(iv) Dominance of Materialism / Place of Materialism :

The immense growth of science and materialism of machine brought a commercialisation of art, literature and music. Religion and spiritualism were in the vain and materialism ascended everywhere. Many poets and novelists felt disgusted with the rapidly developing cult of materialism. So, their works are marked with a sense of revolt against the tide of the modern age. ~~Butler~~ Butler and Huysmans attacked the modern era in their works and criticised the machinery and materialism.

(became)

(v) Aspect of Pessimism / The Role of Pessimism :->

Pessimism is visible everywhere in the literature of 20th century. The age of machinery created a feeling of pessimism and frustration. The two wars have cast a gloomy shadow on much of the poetry of the 20th century. In spite of materialism we are full of tensions & anxieties which are most inseparable feature of modern living. A note of disillusionment and gloom are natural in poetry. Grissing felt awfully disgusted with the modern industrial life and attacked industrialisation in his novels. Literature shows growing attack on the dirtiness, seediness and squalor of cities. e.g. James Joyce and Graham Greene expressed bitterness against seediness in cities. John Mansfield has commented upon the dirtiness of modern trade and commerce in his poetry, especially the poem 'Cargoes'. There is a sharp contrast between the beauty and the romance of the past and dirtiness and squalor of the modern life.

(vi) Sense of Humanitarianism :- During the war, the sad realities of life was visible. The death of many soldiers and people created humanity for the fellows in the society. Some modern poets have created, in their works. They are Gibson, Chasworth and Mansfield who voiced their indignation against social regression. The workers were living very poor life. So, humanity is visible directly or indirectly in the 20th century literature.

(vii) Nature & Romantic Tendency :- In the 20th century literature the interest in nature is found. Nature fascinates them because it offers such a wonderful contrast. It is with the hubbub & ugliness of an industrialised and over-sophisticated age.

We can see, poets, like W. B. Yeats, Edward Thomas, Mansfield, Robert Bodge, W. H. Davies and Edmund Blunden etc. but they couldn't find Wordsworth's mystic significance of nature.

(viii) Importance of Religion & Mysticism :-

In some poems of 20th century, religion and mysticism are found. We have something religious now and then. In the poems of W. B. Yeats, we can find mystical strains. ~~to~~ The poems of Ms. Alice Meynell and Hopkins also dominated by religion & mysticism. Overall impression is this, that the dominance of religion has been decreased gradually. Rituals have been disappeared. People are not interested in religion and even they don't take any special type of care of it.

(ix) Scientific Advancement :- The whole 20th century has been running with scientific advancement. So many new inventions have ~~be~~ been found in mechanic form. Scientific progress has provided a lot of facilities to human being. Because of this type of machine age, the life of the people has become very fast - Everybody is running after time and money. Impossible things became possible with the help of tremendous scientific development.

(x) Development of Education:

During the 20th century, there has been rapid growth of education. Educational facilities were given to all classes of people and it resulted into the greater love for the study of books. So, this age brought about immense output of books. However the sacrifice of art to business became a sorry spectacle of modern life. Different branches of education have been invented and many new institutions have been established. So, education got a tremendous spread.

(xi) Social Changes: Change in Social Life:

The growing tide of materialism has brought about the disintegration of family relationship and authority. Samuel Butler in 'The Way of All Flesh' expressed the revolt of youth against the parental authority. D. H. Lawrence raised his voice against the old Victorian authority and pleaded for the freedom of the individual.

"Sex life is no longer suppressed; but finds vigorous expression in his novels."

Literature has been employed for social purposes especially for reforming the contemporary society. Modern literature shows the tendency of becoming the handmaiden of propaganda and the dramatists employed this medium to discuss social problems.

(xii) Dominance of Novel Form ⇒ The novel became the dominant literary form. Through this important medium the problems have been discussed very well. In addition, the novel is admirably suited as a vehicle for the sociological studies which attracted most of the great artists of the period. The modern novelist is not only interested in social problems, but also equally well inclined to discuss psychological problems of the modern age. So, in the field of novel a new type of novel came into existence and it was 'Stream of Consciousness' novel which is also known as 'Psychological novel'.

(Xiii) Development of Drama Drama has once again witnessed a remarkable revival. The drama form had fallen in the 18th century. The rapid progress in drama started in the hands of John Galsworthy, C. B. Shaw and T. S. Eliot. The pre-war years was a period of the progress of drama and novel. So, to some extent poetry declined. So, modern poetry is not so significant and rich as modern novel and drama. For this A. C. Heward says,

"The demand long before expressed by Yeats, for a new and living poetical tradition was met between the wars in his own work and in that of the new poets."

(3) Conclusion → With/After above discussion, we may say that, during the 20th century, new experiments were ~~the~~ made in all branches of literature. The traditional forms were thrown out and instead of them new literary experiments applied. The experiments were bold and various as those of the inter-war years. During the 20th century "A new and natural corollary was the quest for the new values and presentation, and all the literary genres of the age produced revolutionary developments". Thus, the whole age is fully dominated by scientific advancement, materialism, education and literary forms like novel and drama and then poetry to some extent. In this age, people are mad after money. Due to mechanic type of life, everybody is conscious about time. And this concept has made the life of the people very fast. In short, whole-sided development is visible in this century - so, it is also called an age of mixing culture in literature and an age of complexities, in physical life.