

# EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE OF 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**Principal Dr. Rekha Kalia Bhardwaj**

**Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya**

Mahatma Hans Raj Marg, Jalandhar-144 008 (Punjab)

Before discussing the emerging trends in English literature, it is a must to understand the meaning of literature. Literature is the mirror of society. In C.S. Lewis' words "Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become." In a simpler way, literature is what we see, feel, observe, and then penned down through different genres like poetry, novel, short story, essay or drama. J. Long beautifully states "Behind every book is a man; behind the man is the race; and behind the race are the natural and social environments whose influence is consciously reflected."

Each age has its own characteristics revealing that particular period and its literature. The Renaissance Age (1500-1660) is known for the origin of intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes; in Long's words, The Eighteenth century literature, known as Neo-Classical Age (1660-1798) also, demanded that poetry should follow exact rules; and proposed to have discovered its rules in the classics of Horace and Virgil and Ovid.

The Age of Romanticism (1785-1830) verbalized love for Nature in different ways like Wordsworth

showing divine element in nature; S.T. Coleridge pen-portraying supernaturalism; Lord Byron ferociousness; Keats presenting sensuous beauty and Shelley abstract ideas.

Victorian Age (1837-1901) is an era of transition. In the later part of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, the growth of industrialization, urbanization and the advent of the First World War brought the loss of faith in the traditional values and morals, and caused the colossal wastage of human lives. A time period marked by peace, progress, sensibility on one hand and massacre of spiritual and religious feelings on the other. Materialism and scientific attitude brutally murdered human faith in God. Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy focus on cruel aspects of life; Alfred Lord Tennyson highlighting shaken and shattered beliefs of human world. But poets like Robert Browning holding the horses of optimism and positivity. It is a stage of mixed sentiments in literature.

It is difficult to define one typical characteristic of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. This age is full of experimentation and it is discussed in different genres. The literary canon of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century foregrounds an aesthetic shift which is more transitional; experimental, more anxious, more liberal and self-interrogating too. The lines from Sunita

Sinha's book mark the spirit of both the centuries: "The two world wars, the social and political upheavals, the consolidation and expansion of multinational capitalism, the emergence of the informational age, the struggle of post-colonial voices after the end of the British Empire and the changing configuration of a new multicultural population have led to a restructuring in the sphere of literary studies." Presence of a great range of styles, and approaches led the writers to redefine the specific boundaries of literature.

In pre-world war era, mostly writers remained loyal to the trends of Victorian age. Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) led the world towards mourning over the loss of God. But a change could be noticed with H.G.Well's Utopian Study of A Modern Utopia that captured optimistic mood and gave an expression that science and technology would transform the world.

Meanwhile, Aesthetic Movement gained popularity due to its being in favour of Catholicism and mysticism. Aesthetes believed in the idea that the art is useless if it is in commitment with the ideas of morality and standard of conduct. For them "art for art's sake" has been the motto of the movement. Oscar Wilde is considered to be the mentor of the movement and he believed that the motive of art is to provide sensual pleasure only. His plays The Importance of Being Earnest, A Woman of No Importance, and An Ideal Husband are some applauded examples of aestheticism. W.B. Yeats' prose "The Secret Rose" (1897), "The Tables of the Law"; poems "The Rose", "Crossways" are some of the finest examples.

As a result of all this, Post-world war literature faced constant changes in literary trends. No particular school of thought or movement ruled 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some literary artisans believed in imitation

while others did translation of classics and regional literature. Ted Hughes translated Ovid's Aeschylus and Euripides' works. Christopher Fry's translated works enhanced their already considerable reputation. Works of Munsu Prem Chand, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahasweta Devi have been translated into English and other languages too.

Another trend in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century is Modernism which has its origin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Modernists explored and experimented with literary form and expression. They adhered to Ezra Pound's maxim "to make it new." It was the outcome of drastic efforts to change traditional representation styles into new ways of expressing sensibilities of the time. Some prominent writers and poets of this movement are Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. Pound's poems "Cathay", "Umbra", "Lustra" and "Canto"; Woolf's novels Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse and The Waves are examples of modernist experiment.

Modernism has arisen from two movements: 'symbolism' and 'Imagism' which highly affected the poetic creation of the time. Symbolism is a reaction against naturalism and realism. Imagism finds its roots in the aesthetic philosophy of T.E. Hulme. The poets believed in utilizing common speech; in creating new rhythms and moods; infinite choice of subject matter; excessive use of symbols and images; yet providing clarity in style. Charles Baudelaire's poetry volume Les Fleurs Du Mal marks the beginning of symbolism. Amy Lowell is an American Imagist who promoted the works of imagists in England. Ezra Pound is renowned name in Imagism and he published an anthology under the title Des Imagistes to promote the works of the imagists. All of the modernists worked very hard to

free themselves from the shackles of traditional monopoly of writing form and content.

Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx are the two who questioned human rationality leading to a change in dealing of characters. Instead of dealing with characters as action figures, modernist writers started handling them as someone with thought and soul. This gave birth to another trend of Psycho-analysis. It gave a real life to the characters in novel and drama. James Joyce is the first writer to fully understand the importance of a character's insight. In his novels *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he introduced his characters with monologues. Virginia Woolf coined "Stream-of-Consciousness" to let the readers have a look in the psyche of her characters. This term denotes an endless flow of consciousness and it means that consciousness includes the entire area of mind from illogical, pre-conscious and pre-speech level to rational and conscious speech level, including thoughts, memories, associations and reflections. There are many other terms linked with the stream of consciousness novel like "interior monologues", "stream of thoughts", all denoting that the subject matter of this kind of novel is the inner psyche of man. 'Stream-of-consciousness' technique in a novel is better known as expressionistic technique in drama; Arthur Miller employs this technique with perfection in plays like *Death of a Salesman*(1949). Jean Paul Sartre also focused on the value of a character as an individual and made Existentialism a famous movement of the time. They fought for the existence of human being as an individual; as a free person in literary work. The one who is responsible for his own actions. They believed that an individual is responsible for his life as he acts and reacts according to his own free will and this determines his

nature and directs his life. Concept of existentialism is fully employed by Fyodor Dostoevsky in his novel *Crime and Punishment* and by Franz Kafka in his novel *The Trial*.

When philosophers talk about the value of individual, then Feminist writers restate gender in association with other categories such as race and class. These writers use literature as a strong medium to fight for the rights of women and especially of women writers. Toril Moi through her book *Sexual/Textual Politics* and *What is a Woman?* fought for equal rights and understanding for women. Helene Cixous' text *The Laugh of the Medusa* warns readers, especially women, either to read it fully or remain trapped in the language barriers created by men. Julia Kristeva and Simon de Beauvoir also raised their voices to fight for women and their rights through the podium of literature.

Post-colonial Literature outshined the International arena of fight for the rights of 'Third-World'. Emergence of the writers or poets or playwrights from 'Black or Dark continent' or 'Orient' stunned the English literary world. Aborigines from different colonies throughout the world came up with themes and plots unveiling the brutal deeds committed under the mask of "Christian Burden". Not only local artists like Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart* or Wole Soyinka in his play *Lion and the Jewel* but also white writers like Joseph Conrad in his novella *Heart of Darkness* reflected their strong unhappiness towards Imperial government's hypocrisy. Many British writers believed that it is the responsibility of ruling government to look after the people being ruled.

With emergence of artists from once-colonized countries, a new trend emerged too, i.e. use of vernacular and colloquial language in English

literature. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand in his novels *Untouchable* and *Gauri*; Chinua Achebe in the novel *Things Fall Apart*; Bapsi Sidhwa in her novel *Ice Candy Man*; Kamala Markandya in her novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* have devised regional languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Parsi etc. with standardized English. The major reason has been the dire need of introducing the First Nations with the Idea that the nations once being ruled, are not at all without literature and culture. Also, to show them how they mistreat people with different skin colour and race in their countries. V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and Saul Bellow's *The Victim* are the novels that portrayed the struggle of migrants in foreign lands: how alienated and isolated they feel, how they long for the feeling of belongingness and how indifferently they are treated.

This indifference is a part of all the countries. People not only misbehave with outsiders but with insiders as well. Dalit literature is the outcome of such ill-treatment. The so called 'twice-borns' always misbehaved with dalits or harijans or untouchables. Unfortunately, India has been a fertile ground for such discrimination since ages. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* gives a detailed account of it. A boy with calibre of becoming an officer remains a sweeper because of his low birth. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchables* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* have emerged as popular texts depicting issues of racial segregation and injustice.

In Realist Movement, authors attempted to represent familiar things as they were. They chose to reflect everyday and banal activities and experiences instead of using a romantic story line with exaggeration. Muriel Spark combined satirical realism with implications of an extra-realist and spiritual

dimension in her novels like *Robinson*, *The Bachelors* etc. Samuel Clemens better known as 'Mark Twain' also was equipped with realism in his works as in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

G.B. Shaw, Arthur Miller, Sean O'Casey, E.M. Forster etc. gave accounts of their time's social, political and economic issues. G.B. Shaw in his plays *Saint Joan*, *The Apple Cart* underlined the satire on the political reality of Britain from time to time. Arthur Miller through his dramas *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* pointed out economic and social failures in the times of American economic depression. Sean O' Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock* also presents the failure of society in Ireland to provide social security to a family during war.

Marxist movement began in early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Karl Marx's idea of utopian world; a classless society. Many writers after Industrialization felt the requirement of a society without class-struggle and clashes. John Galsworthy in his work *Strife* dealt with the conflict between proletariat and capitalists. W.H. Auden was also a believer of communism in his early days and he projected this through plays like *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and *On the Frontier*. Stephen Spender also participated in communist flow but for a very short span of time.

Science fiction is a trend which is the outcome of totally opposite realms i.e. facts and imagination. H.G. Wells is one of the renowned fiction writers. He remained fascinated by the prospects that science offered to man. His fantasies *The Time Machine* and *The Invisible Man* show his interest in technology which attracted him to write the science fiction.

*Kitchen Sink Drama* is a product of 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre. It's a way of writing where the protagonist is projected as an 'angry young man'. John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* is considered to be the first

play to present the angry young man of contemporary drama. Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey* is another great example of such theatre.

Comedy of Menace is a unique trend in which playwrights focused on providing fun out of painful and tense situation. Harold Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* is a fine example where humour has been created out of terror. David Campton, Nigel Dennis and N.F. Simpson are some authors producing comedy from horror.

Another style of play writing is 'Theatre of the Absurd' where the action and reaction in the plot fails to deliver any proper meaning. Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* projects this theatre as no one knows anything about Godot: who he is, why others have been waiting for him, why he has failed to come, etc.

Moral Degradation, sexuality and homosexuality are openly discussed by authors in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. They have boldness in dealing with these topics. D.H. Lawrence skilfully deals with mother-son relationship or Oedipus complex in his novel *Sons and Lovers*. T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* is a sermon on degrading system of moral and spiritual values. Tennessee Williams' play *A Street Car Named Desire* focuses on sexual urges. William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* deals with moral corruption of the society portrayed through kids. Literary artists have become quite bold and liberal in dealing with hetro as well as homosexuality.

After medievalism, in 21<sup>st</sup> century magic and mythology are again trending. J.K. Rowling's series *Harry Potter* novels, C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Dan Brown's Novels *The Da Vinci Code*, *Inferno*, *Angles and Demons* are a few examples of use of mythology in modern literature.

Pop or popular fiction is plot-driven work written with the intention of fitting into currently famous literary sub-genre. It is created in order to attract majority of audiences or readers already familiar with the genre. It is also known as Genre fiction. Famous novelist Chetan Bhagat is a pop-fiction writer. His works are *2 States: The story of Marriage*, *Half Girlfriend* etc. The focus remains on becoming best seller and for that the story could be taken to any level.

Digital or Cyber literature is the latest trend in which works of creation are exclusively on and for digital devices. In this trend of literature, the writer relies on cyber medium like website, blogs or social media pages. *Pry* is a novella from collaboration of Danny Cannizzaro and Samantha Gorman also known as *Tender Claws*. Jason Nelson is another digital poet and net-artist. Michael Joyce's *12 Blue* and Jim Andrew's *Stir Fry Texts* are some more examples of digital literature.

Multiple trends have emerged and are emerging in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some are like adaptations of traditional movements and techniques while others are the outcome of science and technology. Hence, these ages depict modern literature through social/political/religious milieus with different genres of poetry, novel and drama.

#### References

1. Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford University Press
2. David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, Volume I and II, Supernove Publishers, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
3. Dr. T.Singh, *A History of English Literature from Chaucer to the Present Day*, Bareilly, Student Store.
4. Ian Mackean, *The Essentials of Literature in English*, Post-1914, Hodder Education

5. John Macquarrie, Existentialism, Great Britain:  
Penguin
6. Legouis and Cazamian's, History of English  
Literature, Macmillan
7. Norman Lowe, Mastering Modern World History,  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition
8. Sunita Sinha, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature: Emerging  
Trends
9. The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.12, London:  
William Benton Publishers
10. Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays, ed. Leonard  
Woolf, Vol.I & II, London: The Hugarth Press
11. William J. Long, English Literature: Its History and  
its significance for the Life of the English – Speaking  
World, Boston: Ginn and Company.  
Yuti Borev, Aestheticism, Progress Publishers

One of the trends that has become notable in the 21st century is so-called autofiction. This style of writing is far from new, (Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* would be a notable example from the past century) though calling it autofiction is recent. Autofiction pretty much boils down to the author melding fiction and memoir.

Certificate of Graduation Creative Writing in English & NONE!, New York Institute of Art and Design (2019). Answered 1 year ago. What literature should students be reading in the 21st century? Read everything your teachers are trying to hide from you. 176 views · What do you consider to be the most enduring and timeless works of literature published before the 20th century? Why? What era produced the best literature? th. -21. st. Centuries. in Russian Translations: Translatability. and the Problem of "The Third Literature". Translation as a dialogue of literatures is possible only in the interaction of these literatures. In this regard, it is reasonable to raise a question about the role and place of translated literature in the context of national literatures.

Among the schools that made the most significant contribution to the theory of translation, we can name the three main ones, such as the English, the German and the French scholar schools. At various times, the linguistic theory of translation was under the influence of various trends in linguistics, such as structuralism, transformational grammar, descriptivism, cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, etc. While 20th-century literature is a diverse field covering a variety of genres, there are common characteristics that changed literature forever. 20th Century English Poetry Development. The 20th century English poetry emerged in the early years of the 20th century through various schools, styles, and influences: 1st Phase. The first phase of the movement, the school of imagism, the style of French symbolist poetry influence of Dome and the dominance of war poetry, these were all different manifestations of modernism in English poetry (1909-16)A.D. 2nd Phase. Presentation on theme: "MODERN BRITISH LITERATURE (20th and 21st century)" Presentation transcript: 1 MODERN BRITISH LITERATURE (20th and 21st century) Lecturer: Doc. PaedDr. 19 John Wain: *Manhood* Set in: unspecified English town, unspecified present Characters: Rob Willison "Mr. Willison" Grace "Mr. Granger" When I was a boy, it was study, study, study all the time, with fear of unemployment and insecurity in everybody's mind. I was never even given a bicycle. I never boxed, I never rowed, I never did anything to develop my physique.

Postmodernism is a new trend in arts that expands to many genres, for example to architecture, painting, music, fashion or literature. 28 terms. evanstraub26. Literature Midterm. 22 terms. jpongemeyer.