MODERNISM

The terms “modernism”, “modernity” and the “modern” in relation to early twentieth century literature have both fascinated and baffled critical inquiry.¹ Modernity refers to enlightenment as it implies a new state of structures and ideas learning behind the regimentations of relations and norms and values.² The modernist ideas and experiments in the arts were discernible in Europe roughly between the year 1890 and 1930. They emerged in the form of a movement in the early twentieth century and came out as a reaction of artists and aesthetically inclined intellectual to the crisis of change. The same was also an attempt at giving adequate expression to the disillusionments, incertitude and widespread social disorder following industrialization, technological change and modernization of the society. It was apparent that the scientific materialistic and imperialistic enterprises of the previous centuries which had led to changed attitudes and sensibilities and to decline of faith had, by the end of the nineteenth century, proved to be a catastrophe to inquisitive minds, Trapped in the mesh of materialism and scientific determinism and lured by the utopian ideals of imperialistic society, it

² Gupta, S, Kar, Prafulla C. Mukherji, Parul Dave: Rethinking Modernity, 2003, Delhi-52 p.11-12
❖ Stream of consciousness
❖ Wide use of classical allusions
❖ Juxtaposition of characters
❖ Intertextuality
❖ Personification
❖ Hyperbole
❖ Parataxis
❖ Comparison
❖ Quotation
❖ Pun
❖ Satire
❖ Irony
❖ Antiphrasis
❖ Unconventional use of metaphor
❖ Symbolic representation
❖ Psycho analysis
❖ Discontinuous narrative
❖ Meta-narrative
❖ Multiple narrative points of view
❖ Uncompromising intellectuality

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Thematic Characteristic:
❖ Breakdown of social norms
❖ Realistic embodiment of social meanings
❖ Separation of meaning and senses from the context
❖ Despairing individual behavior in the faces of an unmanageable future
❖ Sense of spiritual loneliness
❖ Sense of alienation
❖ Sense of frustration
❖ Sense of disillusionment
❖ Rejection of the outdated social system
❖ Objection of the traditional thoughts and the traditional moralities
❖ Objection of the religious thoughts
❖ Substitution of a mythical past
❖ Two world war’s effects on humanity.²¹

Of the many critical studies on the concepts, techniques of structure, form and language of the emerging aesthetic, mention must be made of Alan Friedman’s “The turn of the novel” which defines and elaborates the new directions in the modern novel towards an open form. Although published much later modernism edited by M. Brabdury and J. Mcfarlane,²² is particularly informative about the cultural and intellectual

²¹ Ask. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Modernism as a literary movement is seen, in large part, as a reaction to the emergence of city life as a central force in society. Furthermore, an early attention to the object as freestanding became in latter modernism a preoccupation with form. The dyadic collapse of the distance between subject and object represented a movement from means to is, where Romanticism stressed the subjectively of experience, modernist writers were more actually conscious of the objectively of their surroundings. In modernism the object is, the language does not mean it is, this is a shift from an epistemological aesthetic to an ontological aesthetic or, in simpler terms, a shift from acknowledge based aesthetic to a being based aesthetic. This shift is central to modernism.

Modernity is a polemical tradition which displaces the tradition of the movement, whatever it happens to be, but can later yield its place to still another tradition which in turn is a momentary manifestation of modernity.\textsuperscript{18} The chief characteristics of modernity or modernism are as follows. They may be divided into two groups likely stylistic and thematic characters.

**Stylistic characteristic:**

- Free indirect speech
- Figure of speech

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

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west was a movement to reconcile the developments of nineteenth and twentieth century science and philosophy with historical Christianity. It arose from the application of modern critical methods to the study of the Bible and the history of dogma and stressed the humanistic aspects of religion. It called forth a reaction in the form of fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{17} As a universal proposition modernity comprise in goals of liberated subjectivity, implying an uninhibited expression of the human personality. It is an open-minded experimental spirit in the matter of themes and techniques and an overall passion for originality of expression. It naturally implies a rejection of certain values and standards, conventional techniques and forms

Modernist literature attempted to move from the bonds of realist literature and to introduce concepts such as disjointed timelines. Modernism was distinguished by an emancipatory meta-narrative. In the wake of modernism, and post-enlightenment, meta-narratives tended to be emancipatory, whereas beforehand this was not a consistent characteristic. Contemporary meta-narratives were becoming less relevant in light of the implications of World War I, the rise of trade unionism, a general social discontent, and the emergence of psychoanalysis. The consequent need for a unifying function brought

\textsuperscript{17} George, K.M.: \textit{Modern Indian Literature, An Anthology Surveys & Poetry}, (Vol. I) p. 4.
about a growth in the political importance of culture. Modernist literature can be viewed largely in term of its formal, stylistic, and semantic movement away from romanticism, examining subject matter that is traditionally mundane – a prime example being the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Eliot. Modernist literature often features a marked pessimism, a clear rejection of the optimism apparent in Victorian literature. In fact, “a common motif in modernist fiction is that of an alienated individual a dysfunctional individual trying in vain to make sense of a predominantly urban and fragmented society.” But the questioning spirit of modernism could also be seen, less elegically, as part of a necessary search for ways to make a new sense of a broken world. An example is a drunk man looks at the thistle by Hugh Macdiarmid, in which the individual artists applied Eliot’s techniques to respond to a historically fractured nationalism, using a more comic, parodic and optimistic modernist expression in which the artist as ‘hero’ seeks to embrace complexity and locate new meanings. However, many modernist works like T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land are marked by the absence of even of a central, heroic figure. Modernist literature often moves beyond the limitations of the realist novel with a concern for larger factors such as social or historical change. This is prominent in “stream of consciousness” writing.
backgrounds of modernism, besides proving a comprehensive compilation of essays discussing the developing trends and interactions in the wider European context and affecting all aspects of literary art forms.

The various factors leading to a cultural upheaval and to the changed psychology or sensibility of man and had been operating since earlier centuries. During the Victorian period it could be seen that the high ideals of social good and progress of expansion and exploration, had regrettably degenerated into gross materialism and greed. Such a disillusioning features had turned men of letters of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, into other directions in search of inspiring sources in the ideals and values of a cogenial culture and into the glorious traditions of a golden past. This aspect has been widely discussed by G.S. Fraser. This yearning for a past culture among such artists Signalled the awakening of sensibilities and of intellectual curiosity. Coinciding with a fresh interest in doctrines which stressed the pivotal role of imagination over reason in human society, it paved the way for modern imaginative literature too. This is evident from the revival of interest in the eighteenth century philosopher vico in “the new science (1725) in which vico enunciated the primary of imagination, he also explained his theory of cultural history as a cyclical phenomenon. Similar doctrines of recurrence

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departures from contemporary themes and conventional modes of narrative and linguistic experience.

When precisely this typical modernist consciousness struck root in literature is not clearly determinable. But assessing from the years when post-impressionist paintings became a popular movement in art, and modernist ideas of philosophy, science painting and other arts were practiced in literature most widely and intensely, the decades between 1910 and 1930 have often been referred to as the period of modernity in literature. In this connection an exhibition of French post – impressionists painting opened in December 1910, which enthralled the whole of England and influenced not only a large number of painters but writers as well, is thought to be significant event. The deals of post – impressionism became the ideals of the new generation of writers in England who later came to be called modernists. Generally speaking, 1910 has been taken to be the cut off years for the modernist movement after Virginia woolf’s famous declaration during a lecture to a group of university students, to the effect that human nature had changed in or about 1910. However, other suggest still different dates. Harry Levin, for instance, favours 1922

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attitudes, new areas of exploration, new values. The awareness among that small section of literary men and the perceptive few of a crisis in civilization and of the decay of institutions which communicate values in society itself, coincided with an upsurge of ideas in different areas of thought. In this manner, the ground was prepared for the aesthetics of change that in course of time came to be collectively termed the 'modernist tradition'. The aesthetic of modern grow out of the interaction of a vast complex of idea, theories and movement, some similar and some contradictory. In 1890s all over Europe witnessed the changing patterns of artistic thought as social realism gave place to naturalism and thereof to the psychological realism of the modern. And so it may be called that the modernist movement is actually a reaction against the naturalist movement. The break-up of dogma system and absolutes and the growing sense of the flux, conflict and incertitude together with the popularity of individualistic doctrines, turned artistic attentions from the general and external aspects of life to the subtle activities of human mind, that is from social to individual concerns. In other words, both the selection of subject matter and the significance of experience in literature too were considerably influenced by the trends of changing thought.

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26 Spender, Stephen, p. 6.
Subjectivism and relativism of modern thought thus bridge the gap between and explore the inter-relatedness of all things, particularly in relation to the subjective self and the objective environment. Heisenberg’s discovery of the atomization of matter indicted that the mind and the matter can be explored, not only as whole entities but also in their fragmented condition. This eventually led to the recognition in modern literature of the multiplicity and fragmentariness of all phenomena which are uncertain or not wholly recoverable. The insistence on intuitive or imaginative experience in modern thought coincided with the new doctrines of time and consciousness. The effect of all new generation of writers was clearly evident in the verve of experimentation which followed. The revolution in thought brought both freshness and newness and was a welcome Singh in the literary circles of modern age. The same was instrumental in bringing about the transition of the novel in the direction of self-conscious introspective art.\(^\text{27}\)

Literary men who were expressing the impulse towards modernity in different ways, during the early years were doing so out of urgent inner needs, without being conscious of their experiments as part of a movement or a tradition. Responding to individual artistic needs and intentions and working in isolation their separate attempts tuned out to be

were latter propagated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explain,\textsuperscript{24} the cultural crisis of modern times. For while vico's ideas spring from and affirm an abiding faith in God in a stable and harmonious world, both the author of thus \textit{Spake Zarathustra} (1883) and the \textit{Decline of the West} likely Nietzsche and Spengler in an age of diminishing faith, when God was declared to be dead, were more aesthetistic in their views. But it is of significant importance that the theory of birth, development and decay of cultures has greatly influenced decadent and modern literature. According to vico, who considered it to be a natural phenomenon that as society develops, it gradually dissociates from the natural and the spiritual and then becomes artificial and degenerate. He observes: "Men at first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still latter amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury and waste their substance. It was evident that after industrialization most people were carried away by the idea of progress and dreams of wealth and power, and drifted with the unabated current. The hitherto self-sufficient agriculturalist now turned city dweller and lured by the prospects of material prosperity, found himself in the theories of completion of modern economy drawn into the mechanized and atomized routine of industrialized activity, he seemed to have lost the ability to appreciate or find comfort in the traditional values of a natural

\textsuperscript{24} Ellman and Fiedelson, p. 454.
culture based on folklore and sound human relationship. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that modern industrialization and its attendant evils had not only distorted the individual sense of values but had also wrought a drastic change in the general psychology within the social fabric. For as life became more competitive and measured in terms of money power, the earlier stress on the personal element in individual and social relationship came to be treated as of little consequence by themselves but only as part of and as deriving significance from a group or a community, that is of a collective body or a system. It may be inferred that modern industrial and economic systems at the turn of the century either failed to arrest the pace of change and hence of the drift of society towards complete breakdown of faith in existing institutions and systems or to resolve the conflict inherent in society or it may be that the forces of integration and cohesion simply failed to work. In the arts, the reaction emerged in the form of the modernist movement, a movement of immense dimensions, aesthetically inclined and directed towards a reorientation of culture on new lines. Those who were aware quick to perceive that the new hopes and aspirations which material development had ushered in also man made restless and impatient. While on the one hand, science and rationalism made headway and continued to find expression in contemporary writings, there was at the same time a desperate cry-a vociferous demand for fundamental change, new
the revolutionary and the conservation, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technologists age and the condemnation of it, an excited acceptance of the belief that the old regimes of cultures were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escapes from historicism and the pressures of the time with convictions that they were precisely the living expressions of these things.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid p. 46
of modernist aesthetic. The alienated stance of such writers and poets subjectively engaged in recreating values had divided society into two distinct groups as shown by F. R. Leavis – the civilized masses and the minority who were in search of a different culture.34

Modernism is an encompassing label for a wide variety of cultural movements.35 Today it must surely seem that the truth lies somewhere between the views that modernism is the supreme modern expression and the view that it is of marginal importance. Modernism is clearly more than an aesthetic event and some of the conditions that the behind it are discernible and clear. Yet it contains a highly aesthetic response, one which turns on the assumption that registering of modern consciousness or experiences was not a problem in representation but a profound cultural and aesthetic crux – a problem in the making of structures, the employment of language, the uniting of form, finally in the social meaning of the artist himself.36 The exchange of intellectual ideas between London and other European cities picked up in nineteen’s and saw waves of fresh doctrine of German, Russian, French and Scandinavian origin pouring into English literary circles.37 In short

Modernism is an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and nihilistic,

35 Ask. oxford.com
37 Ibid p. 172-78.
as a modernist year because of intensity and volume of modern writings in that year.  

Modernity or a version of it came to India as a colonial legacy as a handmaid of colonialism with the introduction of new system of administration, western education, communication and transport facilities and grudging and slow industrialization. A secular system of education was introduced following the provision of the Charter Act of 1813 which acquired the East India Company to educate the people and to invest money for the revival and improvement of literature and for the introduction and propagation of knowledge of sciences. Wood’s Dispatch categorically stated that the object of education to be extended to the Indian’s was “The diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe in school of European knowledge. It also emphasized mass education and female education. The new administrative structure that the colonialist imposed on India needed the services of such personal who were educated in the western model. The British Colonialists emphasized knowledge because they saw knowledge as a source of power. Knowing the past of the colonial help them control their subjects. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the pioneer of modernity in India, wanted not merely English education but a more scientific education as he felt that

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scientific outlook was essential for the development of the country. Dinkar observes that initially Indian's were averse of European modernization because they saw the British as the symbol of modernization as the British were hated the oppressors and exploiters. But the people did welcome the technological benefits of modernization. The coming of steamers and the extension of railway connections to the interior regions of the country were events to the celebrated in folk songs, although such technological innovations including telegraph and telephone were introduced primarily for exploiting the natural resources of the country and for disciplining and controlling its people.30

Technological and industrial growth have brought power to a number of western peoples and countries.31 However, this technological developments and the growth of trade and commercial link further facilitated the exchange interaction and filtration of intellectual ideas into literary and aesthetic centers and societies all over Europe. The cross currents of literary and aesthetic movements and manifestoes, embodying various trends of modern thoughts found diverse expression, symbolism, impressionism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, cubism, futurism, surrealism and the like together came to be incorporated into the large movement known as modernism. Growing out of a common ideology,

30 Gupta S., Kar Prafulla, C. Mukherji, Parul Dave: Rethinking Modernity, Delhi-52, p. 44
they were expressions of a common distrust of historical process and as Lionel Trilling suggests “a sort of indignant perception” of the very culture of which they were products.\textsuperscript{32} E.B. Tailor also suggest cultures is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society,\textsuperscript{33} and hence the breakdown the common terms of reference. The tendency of explore new areas of experience and to discover afresh different modes of artistic expression, could be discerned among that small group, the minority that aimed at serious art and also among the more radical ‘avante garde’ who broke away from the traditional, the received and the given. In England, the decline of the Victorian ideas of progress and of imperial glory and the artificial yet anarchic conditions prevailing in society, alienated artists and the elite from the mainstream of popular culture. The isolated stance of intellectual societies such as the Bloomsbury group, the Cambridge scholars and the American writings in England was in reaction against mass culture in every form of creative activity and a hatred of the mechanical and uninspiring influences of bourgeois and industrials features discernible in the cities. Thus estranged from contemporary environment, these artists turned their attention to their own creative potentials and manifested a novel interest in the trends

\textsuperscript{32} Trilling, Lionel: \textit{The Opposing Self}, London, 1955, P. 10

\textsuperscript{33} Pujari, Dr. Archana: \textit{Asomia Kabitar Bisar Bisleshon}, Panbazar, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition, August 2006, Ghy-1, p. 240.