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Modernism and its Impact on the Psychology of Characters in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and R. N. Tagore's *Red Oleander*

Deepika

Research Scholar

Department of English

TMB University, Bhagalpur

&

Faculty of Humanities,

DPS International, Singapore.

Abstract

Modernism reflects an attempt to use a language in a way that desires to communicate a message. Modernism is like the transverse wave which one hand has brought the liberation of the self from the bondages of previously settled ideologies and on the other hand has headed the human race towards the verge of extinction. Modernism, a literary and cultural thought which flourished in the early 20th century is generally used as a term to refer to the thoughts and ideas reflected in the English literature of the modern age. The major figures belonging to this period include American and Irish writers such as Eliot, Yeats and Joyce, as well as the Norwegian and Swedish dramatists Ibsen and Strindberg. The term 'Modernist' was not generally used by the exponents of the movement themselves, who rather referred to their works and aesthetic theories as 'modern', but became popular later, when the groups in question were clearly no longer modern in a historical sense. The one notable early use of the term was in the critical work of Robert Graves and Laura Riding entitled 'A Survey of Modernist Poetry' (1927).

Keywords: Modernism, Aesthetics, Symbolism, Anthropology

Modernism as a movement can be recognized not only in literature but also in painting, music, architecture as well as in the science and theology, aesthetics and anthropology. The term of the century incorporates all such thoughts which developed during the late 19th century and the early 20th century, was a key movement where a number of theories, to prove influential to modernism, were elaborated, such as Darwin's theory of species (1883), Einstein's treatise on relativity (1905), Max Planck's on quantum theory (1900) and Freud's



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on the unconscious (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900). In the literary domain, major influences on Modernism include the late 19th century French novelist Flaubert and the symbolist poet, Mallarme.

Modernism is not a term to which a single meaning can be ascribed. It may be applied both to the content and the form, and to either in isolation. It reflects a sense of cultural crisis which is both exciting and disquieting, in that it opens up a whole new vista of human possibilities at the same time as putting into question any previously accepted means of grading and valuating new ideas. Modernism is marked by experimentation, particularly manipulation of forms, and by the realization that knowledge is not absolute. Marx, Freud and Darwin unsettled the human subject from its previously secure place at centre of at least the human universe and had revealed its unwitting dependence on laws and structures outside its control and sometimes beyond its knowledge.

It is important to discuss the basic concept of Modernism with all its casting influences so as to dive deep into the psychology of the mind of the characters for the better understanding of the matters. The period to which Lawrence and Tagore belonged was an era completely submerged in the sea, better to say ocean of the concept of Modernism from which emerged the conflict between the body and the soul, the conscious and the subconscious, the ideal state of existence and the prevailing one. From here started the invisible rotting and erosion of the true culture and civilization which sowed the seed of the development of characters like Gerald, to whom the mechanized world seemed to be the symbol of his successful achievements, in case of Lawrence's *Women In Love*, and the king and the governor of the Yaksh town who had lost out their real essence of life, digging out the mud for their material satisfaction which the gold beneath the earth brought them in case of Tagore's *Red Oleander*. Lawrence's *Women in Love* is actually a metaphor with symbolic meaning where Lawrence tries to understand the universal mysteries of life involving the abstracts. The need to dive deep into the subconscious mind to understand the psychology of the character and thereby settle the dispute between the inner and the outer self is the result of series of contradictions and paradoxes that Modernism has resulted in. modernism has wiped out the practicality in relationship in terms of both personal and social perspectives and Lawrence has best presented the true picture through the characters – Birkin, Ursula, Gudrun and Gerald, each having some sort of connectivity among themselves but hidden, a vague and abrupt one. Lawrence has canvassed the loss of old values without the establishment of the new system, the result being, the characters pondering out for some sort of stability. It is evidenced by the character of Birkin who though seems to be influenced by the old values but at the same time is doubtful and contradicts about them.

Though symbolism as a conscious art form is conceived as a reaction against realism, Tagore's symbolic artistry in *Red Oleander*, achieves a co-relation of the real and the ideal,

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the temporal with the eternal, each reinforcing the other. *Red Oleander* which is the English translation of 'Rakta Karabhi' is the other striking evidence of the work of art highly influenced by the 'modernistic movement'. The working of the mind of the characters in the drama seems to be caged by the modernist impact. The progress of the characters, better to say 'the limited progress', which was restricted to the materialistic arena, seems to prison up the true spirit of the human mind resulting in the creation of mechanized individuals. Be it Gokul, Kishore, the professor or the priest, all belonging to different strata of the society, seems to be the slaves of the modernized world. The only free human spirit who later brings out the salvation of the entire human race dwells in the form of Nandini who is the multiple symbol of love and fear, enthusiasm and struggle, but above all the persona of vital energy. The drama at best presents the dehumanization of the personality out of the materialistic progress, the essence of Modernism.

Historical and materialistic determinism, psycho-analytic theories while reveal the self as a pawn in a progress dominated by an inaccessible unconscious play of forces and a conception of evolution and heredity which situates humanity as no more than the latest product of natural selection. These theories conspire to threaten humanist self confidence and to provoke a feeling of ideological uncertainty; and so far as the arts were concerned, such insecurity proved immensely productive. It engendered aesthetics of experimentation, fragmentation, ambiguity and nihilism. Modernism was built on a sense of lost community and civilization since it had no stable centre, in a logical sense, mutually exclusive. The loss of a sense of a tradition for example, was a theme common to Modernist writers but it was lamented by some in an extensive form of reactionary conservatism and celebrated by others as a means of liberation from the stranglehold of the past practices. Liberalism i.e. progressivism and conservatism co-existed not necessarily peaceably, under the modernist umbrella. This can best be reflected in Birkin's conversation with Ursula, where he says- "...the whole idea is dead. Humanity itself is dry-rotten, really."

And then again:

I loathe myself as a human being. Humanity is a huge aggregate lie and a huge lie is less than the individual because the individual may sometimes be capable of truth and humanity is a tree of lie.

Not surprisingly, the diversity of the modernist theory is matched by the vanity of the modernist practice. Poets like T. S. Eliot in his *Waste Land* (1922) and Ezra Pound in his cantos (1917-1970) express the concerns of modernism in a form which itself breaks radically with previous poetic tradition. Similarly Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) explore the disintegration and fragmentation of conscious control in their protagonists, adopting a style which itself mirrors the disconnectedness of experiences and the triumph of the random and contingent over the structural and unified.



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The dissolution of meaning, the incoherence of character, the lack of recognizable 'plot' are features which not only transmit but actually constitute the 'theme' of the art or work.

'Modernism' represents rather an attempt to use a language in a way that is driven by signifier as much as by the signified (de Saussure, semiotics), that is to say, the desire to communicate a message. Modernism is like the transverse wave which one hand has brought the liberation of the self from the bondages of previously settled ideologies and on the other hand has headed the human race towards the verge of extinction. By extinction, I do not mean the literal explanation but the loss of culture and decay of civilization leading the world towards the era of consumerization – the environment where the modern concept of 'use and throw', 'buy and sell' prevails. Be it the case of relationship in Gerald and Gudrun's term or the numbering of individuals in the Yaksha Town, eroding away the personal identifies. Though Lawrence and Tagore as well, has never used the word 'consumerization' as such but through their works they have been successful in presenting the clashes between the cultural values and materialistic values, with a sense of loss prevailing in the psychology of each and every character.

'Modernism' as a thought, imbibed in every mind has always resulted in the evolution or in a refined expression, the development of 3 D's – Disintegration, Dissolution and Death, at all level rising from personal to social to cosmic level. The three D's being the cause of the psychological upheavals in the mind of characters resulting in chaos and the ultimate collapse of civilization. 'Modernism' as such has not only provided the so called personal freedom but has brought turmoil in the personalities causing frictional to and fro, which is leading humanity towards culmination.

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