

Modern English Poetry

The first half of the twentieth century is one of the most turbulent eras in the history of English literature. It marks a sharp and clear departure from the self-complacency, compromise and stability of the Victorian period. The romantic tradition of the previous age was rejected. The poet was no longer a singer of beautiful dreams expressing himself in sweet words. The poet had to express the chaos and the changing scenario of life and society around him. T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* was both 'a demonstration and a manifesto of what the new poetry wanted to do and could do'. A.C. Ward writes about this time - "When the twentieth century opened, Tennyson had been dead nine years, and there was a wide spread impression that English poetry had died with him."

ASTOUNDING VARIETY OF THEMES IN MODERN POETRY -

Poetry to-day can be written on almost any subject. The modern poet finds inspiration from railway trains, tramcars, telephone, the snake charmer and things of commonplace interest. Modern poets have not accepted the theory of great subjects for poetic composition. The whole universe is the modern poet's experience. He writes on themes of real life and also makes excursion in the world of religion, mysticism and fairyland. We have a wide variety of poems such as *The Songs of Train* by John Davidson, *Good Train at Night* by Kenneth Ashley, *The Charcoal Burner* by Edmund Gosse, *Machine Guns* by Richard Aldington and *Listeners* by Walter De la Mare.

In their moods also, modern poets are varied and do not belong to a single recognizable group. "Mr. Bridges is the poet of nine o'clock in the morning, Mr. Hardy of midnight. The truth is there has never been a greater variety of moods among poets than during the past two generations."

Humanitarian and Democratic Note :-

Modern poetry is marked with a note of humanitarianism and democratic feeling. The modern poet, more than Wordsworth, is interested in the life of labourers, toilers and workers in the field. He perceives in the daily struggles of these people the same potentialities of spiritual conflict that the older poets found in those of exalted rank.

Masefield, Gibson, Galsworthy are mainly interested in the common man and his sufferings. In their poetry there is a note of sympathy for their miserable lot. Their grim annals and dark horrors find an expression in their poetry. John Masefield finds a feeling of dejection in love. The beauty of the beloved reminds him at once of the decay of physical charms. His mind never seems to forget that:

"Death has a lodge in lips as red as cherry

Death has mansion in the yew tree berries"

Nature in Modern Poetry :-

Nature captivates the modern poet no less than the poets of the earlier ages. But the modern poet of nature is not a mystic. He does not find any spiritual meaning in Nature. He is elated and exalted at the sight of nature's loveliness. He gives an exquisite picture of birds, clouds, landscapes, sea and the countryside in his poetry. Masefield, Robert Bridges, Edmund Blunden are the great poets of Nature in modern poetry.

Complexity and Psychology in Modern Poetry

Some modern poets are interested in delving deep in to the recesses of the subconscious mind. Some of the poems of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are difficult to follow because of their psychological complexity and difficult imagery.

Longingness in Modern Poetry —

Longingness is at the root of all poetry whether ancient or modern. Modern poets express longingness of all kinds in their poetry. W. B. Yeats's *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is the yearning of a homesick heart translated in to the music of his dreams. Rupert Brooke's *Old Vicarage Granchester* is not merely a wail, it is a cry of homesickness. John Masefield's *Seekers* is the best example of the longing of man for God and eternal city of light.

Diction and Style of Modern Poetry :-

Modern poets have a preference for simple and direct expression. Old archaic words and usages are no longer in vogue. What guides the modern poet in his selection of words is expressiveness. Words are chosen for their association and only those words are employed which convey the meaning.

Modern poets have chosen to be free in the use of metre. They have followed *Verse Libre*, i.e. freedom from trammels of verse. They have made experiments in versification. Verse rhythm is replaced by sense rhythm. There is free verse movement in modern poetry.

The poets of modern age are sincere in their vocation. There is the stamp of honesty in modern poetry. "The poetry of the 20th century is less vague, less verbose, less eloquent than most poetry of the Victorian period. It has set before itself an ideal of absolute simplicity and sincerity— an ideal which implies an individual and unsteretyped diction and an individual and unsteretyped rhythms."