

WORLD WAR : “IMPACT ON 20TH CENTURY POETRY LITERATURE”

Dr. Swati Chauhan
Associate Professor
Department of English
Lingayas University,
Faridabad

The Long shadow of two world wars of 1914-1918 and 1935-1945 lie across the present century. Science and Technology have transformed our lives. The cinema has almost outside the theatre; even where the tradition of the stage is strong enough to survive, it has infected the technique of the drama, even of the novel.

As the 20th century, turned new values replaced the old ones and Britain. England fast lost its imperial image as her colonies revolted and fought for independence. Industrialization progressed by leaps and bounds and the two world wars brought economic depression. All this affected the content of literature. Writers sought new vehicles of expressions.

Many a poet wished to fight free from the fixed rules of versification and wrote in free verse. Many imitated the American poet Walt Whitman. English Literature became more expensive in its concerns. The life and culture of foreign lands were depicted. Although Kipling was an imperialist, his works go beyond England. Being born in India, his works give a graphic view of the country. The great Celtic Revival under Yeats brought a new strain to English Literature finally, the theatre, lying dormant for a century, now woke up with renewed vigour.

20th century poetry is a curious mixture of the traditional and the experimental, of the old and the new. Modern poetry is a poetry of revolt against tradition, and as such there is much in it that is experimental. A deep feeling of love and joy in nature is a prominent characteristic of such poets as W.H. Davies, Walter De La More, Edmund Blunder etc. But the modern poet does not spiritualize nature, like Wordsworth, nor does he intellectualize her like Shelley. The new poetry is realistic and the poet's consciousness of the grim realities of life has shattered all illusions and romantic dreams. As a result of science and the spirit of rationalism, the poet is skeptical about God. Hardly laugh ironically at him, and houseman does not hesitate to call him a “brute or a black guard”. Despite its stark realism in theme and treatment, there also runs a vein of romanticism in modern poetry. Modern poetry has also been influenced by the techniques of music, sculpture, painting and other arts. The modern poet is constantly experimenting with new verse forms and poetic techniques.

The Great war of 1914-18 exercised a considerable influence of English Poetry. It is noteworthy for the spirit of cynicism, satire and realism. The poets wrote about the glories of war, patriotism and victory. Some of them participated in the war itself and so they are also known as soldier poets. These poets sang of the nobility of self-sacrifice and sublimity. They strike the note of optimism and hope. Broke welcomed war with enthusiasm and wrote fine war sonnets. He considered war as a glorious adventure and was himself killed in action. He saw the world with a clear eye and recorded what he saw with directness and clarity. These war poets revealed the horrors and ugliness of war and Sassoon was the first great soldier poet. Sassoon

and Wilfred Owen, who was killed in war in 1918, his ‘Strange Meeting’ between two dead soldiers is perhaps the most intensely tragic poem of the time. The war had induced a mood of depression as well as a revulsion of feeling against European civilization. In this atmosphere were published Elliot’s satirical poems styled ‘Prufrock and other observation’ (1917) and ‘Wasteland’. In a very real sense, the persons of Prufrock typically embodies as much a man of 20th century, the war time. Prufrock’s sterility is more typical of the man of that time. So also are Gerontion, Sweeney and the host of Character in ‘The water Land’. We still find in the poem more sensitive artistic and yet realistic expression of the despair, frustration, disgust, meaninglessness of life and death, sexual and political violence of that time. The poem does give tragic premonitions of the unnamable horrors, fears and corroding anxieties which are dogging people. The words of the last stanza of the ‘The hollow men’

*“This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world end
Not with a ban of but with a whimper”*

Apply more to marked by meaningless wars (Vietnam, Iran-Iraq). Meaningless terrorism, meaningless economic affluence, psychiatric disorder all it were the impact of wars, which we will find in Elliot’s poetry. Among the war poets W.B. Yeats is the most remarkable and holds the central place in Irish literary movement. In his later poems there is a note of sadness and suffering. The poetry of this period proves that a poet cannot escape the sordid realities of the world as we find in its poems. As in the poem ‘Second Coming’. When this poem was published it was the time of Black and Tan war in Ireland and First world war and the Russian revolution were just over. The poet was extremely puzzled by the contemporary situations and violence displayed by the society. Thus the poem deals with the disintegration of modern society the puzzled mood of the poet.

“Turning and turning in the heidening gyre

.....
*“Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold
mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”*

In this poem poet expresses his sorrow at the loss of faith an increase of anarchy everywhere, things are changing fast. In Yeats another poem “A prayer for my daughter” he presents the social and political atmosphere around him. The poem has a stormy background, a world torn by the political differences.

*“An heard the sea wind scream upon the tower.
And under the arches the bridge and stream
In the elms above the flooded stream.”*

W.H Auden also has a spate of war on his poetry. His earliest poems reveal his revolutionary zeal and his idealism which did not continue in him for long. He shifted to America by the time the second world war broke out and took citizenship there. He started taking keen interest in themes concerned with human freedom and expressed dislike for war. He was well aware of the shallowness and disintegrating influence of war on human civilization. His poetry was extremely class conscious and he reveals faith in violent social revolution. As in his poem “Musses Des Beaux arts” Yeats lament at the loss of faith in religion, the difference of Nature and Humanity to the fact of individual suffering. Whereas the old are anxiously awaiting the rebirth of Christ, Children who are most interested in games remain unconcerned about Christ and the Christian religion. In that time and the world of today religion and spiritualism are

on the wane and everywhere materialism is in the ascendancy. Many poets and novelists have felt disgusted with the growing cult of materialism and their works are marked with a note of revolt against this advancing tide of the modern times and it was the impact of world war and other revolutions.

Edith Sitwell is also a very popular poet of this period. She also exposed the futility and artificiality of modern life. She laid the foundation of wheels in opposition to Georgian poetry and reacted sharply against romanticism and traditionalism. In her later poems, we feel a sense of beauty and human heartedness. “*The Sleeping Beauty*” is one of her remarkable works. She was considerably influenced by the second world war and her memorable war poems are “*The song of the cold*” and “*The Canticle of the sun*”.

As Philip Larkin is considered one of the foremost figures in 20th century poetry. Larkin appears before us as a realist. His own poetry also reflected his “sad-eyed” realism which indicates his melancholy outlook of life. We find him philosophically pre-occupied with problems like belief, knowledge and other things. He is concerned with the conditions of post war England which had been created immediately after the end of second world war in 1945. So Larkin has contained the age of sufferings from disappointment and hopelessness. Many of his poems express the pessimistic outlook about religion, society and present government. His poem “*Church Going*” expresses his pessimistic and gloomy outlook about Church and religion. This poem shows the present ruined condition of Churches. In this poem Larkin expresses the condition of religion and church after the war. Poe seems concerned about the disbelief of the people in religion and its decay as a consequence. People enter the church but not for worship and devotion, hence, the poet is concerned about the future of this sacred building. In future, they will lose all their holiness and divinity from the public and they will become places of superstitions as Larkin says:-

*“when churches fall completely out of use,
what we shall turn them into”*

Thus the modern poets are no more dreamy but have the courage to see life in all its ugliness. This realism is note worthy among war poets. Who had themselves faced and experienced those miseries. They “*present in brutal verse the realities of war without gloss or evasion.*” The poetry of second world war expresses a sense of loneliness and desperation and the pre-dominant tone is of sadness. The popular war poets were:- Keith Douglas, Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes and Alan Rook.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Thomas H. Briggs, Max. J. Herzber : English Literature, New Andold
 Pro Bhagwat S. Goyal : Legouis & Cazamian’s History of English, Lit. Vol. 5
 S.C. Mundra : Ages and Movement in literary History
 Akhileshwar Jha: The poetry of T.S. Eliot
 Dr. B.R. Sharma : T.S. Eliot the Waste land and other poems
 Dr. S.C Mundra : The Waste land
 Dr. S.C. Mundra : W.B. Yeats selected poems
 Dr. S.C. Mundra : W.H. Auden, A critical study of selected poems
 Dr. V.K. Gupta and Dr. Kumud Agarwal : Philip Larkin selected poems
 Dr. V.K. Gupta and Dr. Kumud Agarwal : Germs of English poetry