

:: STRUCTURE ::**1.0 Objectives****1.1 Introduction****1.2 Influences**

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall learn about

- Defining Modern Age
- Understanding its salient features
- Tracing the history of Modern Age
- Taking an overview of its background
- Taking a look at various themes

After completing the Unit, you should be able to

- Understand what modern age means
- Understand the main characteristics of the age
- Understand the history of the age
- Understand the factors affecting the Modern Age

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the Modern age is a period in the history of Europe the time frame for which is not as fixed as that of the other ages, it would be imperative to understand what modern means before looking at the modern age in Europe. The Oxford Dictionary defines modern as ‘relating to the present’; as also, ‘who advocates or practises a departure from traditional styles or values. Now you would know why there has always been a disagreement on the exact period that should be known as the modern

age. In the text ahead, we shall focus on the period during and post the two World wars, as this is the time that is celebrated as the Modern Age in English Literature.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

Modern age extends from 1914 to 1950 roughly. The beginning of the Modern age may be traced from the end of the Victorian period. The generation immediately after the Victorian age regarded the Victorian Age as a hypocritical age and they were themselves marked by a sense of rebellion. There was a clear divorce from the emotional morality of the Victorian age.

The stability of Queen Victoria's regime was gone, leaving England in a state of utter confusion. War ravaged Europe; revolution was threatening to topple monarchies in Russia and Spain.

A complete change was sensed in the world view with Freud exposing the workings of individuals' thoughts and desires; Einstein undermining the Newtonian view of the universe by expounding his theory of relativity. Painters like Picasso were pulling the human form apart into geometric shapes. Technology overpowered human emotions as never before. Motorcars, gas and electric light, photography, phonographs, the telephone, the telegraph-technology ruled the roost. Aeroplane was being created. On one hand technology means comfort and on the other it means isolation. Isolation and a sense of alienation marked the literature of this age.

The most powerful influence on this age was the War- the First World War. It was a war as the world had never imagined and they called it The Great War thinking that such a thing would never be repeated. The upheavals of the period between the two World wars shook men's belief in all long –entrenched ideas. After the First World War depression, want and unemployment increased. The League of Nations was set up to establish world peace. In spite of all the peace-making efforts, the Second World War broke out in 1939. It was understood that nothing is permanent or unchangeable. After that a large number of anti-war books were written. These books exposed the futility and hollowness of war. All that was revered in the Victorian age as beautiful came to be looked upon as ugly and mean. That which was considered sacrosanct came to be challenged. The sense of family sanctity declined.

During the First World War, women began showing their strength and helping in place of the fighting men. This led to the Women's Rights movement. All over the world, women began fighting for their right to vote.

With human emotions taking a backseat, literature had to change its course too. Modern writers could no longer write in the old manner. If they played on such sentiments as the contempt for money, divine love,

natural beauty, the sentiments of home and life, classical scholarship, and communication with the spirit of the past, they would not sound convincing. Writers could not remain indifferent to the world around them and their works had to echo the sense of disappointment and disillusionment that had become the voice of the times.

Having been marked by a sense of disillusionment and alienation, the post Victorian generation was known as the lost generation. Emotions gave way to reason and the Modern age is clearly defined by a sense of rationalization.

- **Check Your Progress - I**

Let us see how much you were able to comprehend. Try to answer these questions. The first one is done for you.

1. How would you define Modernism?

2. What, according to you, would be the timeline for the Modern Age?

3. In what ways is the Modern age different from its previous age?

4. What was the most powerful influence on the Modern Age?

1.3 CHARACTERISTICS

There was a clearly marked difference in perception in the Modern age from the Victorian age. Concepts changed, approaches changed and everything was seen in a new light. Some of the important characteristics that defined the Modern age are enumerated here for you to understand:

I.iii.i. Nihilism:

Nihilism may be seen as the most marked characteristic of modern age. Rejection of all long –entrenched ideas and principles was at the root of modernist thought. Control and authority were vehemently challenged and freedom of individuality was hailed as the only principle for a holistic growth.

I.ii.i. Increasing role of science and technology:

Telegraph, aircrafts, and oil refining machines were some of the wonders that science gifted to the post Victorian generation. The growth and development in science and technology brought about a complete transformation in the way of life. Inventions like X-ray changed the very approach to the human body. Newer inventions made it imperative to redefine human life in order to keep pace with times.

I.iii.iii. Disillusionment

World War-I became evidence to the fact that modern man was capable of much horror and destruction. This led to disillusionment and absolute lack of faith in human goodness.

I.iii.iv. Individualism

Celebration of an individual as the champion of this world is one of the salient characteristics of the modern age. However, in the absence of an established set of values there was a sense of anxiety and interrogation for the search for a new set of values which could form the center.

I.iii.v. Art For Life's Sake

It became difficult for the artists to celebrate art as art; they could not turn a blind eye to the horrors of life around. Art shifted its focus from pleasure to life. The negation of art for art gave way to art for life. Instead of celebrating romance, royalty and glamour; artists wrote about poverty and the man in the street.

I.iii.vi. Freud

Freud emphasized the inner reality instead of the external reality. The unconscious mind came to be accepted as more important than the conscious mind.

• Check Your Progress - II

Let us see how much you could understand. Try to answer these questions. The first one is done for you.

1. What are some of the most notable characteristics of the Modern age?

Nihilism, individualism, anxiety and interrogation are some of the characteristics that make Modern age quite remarkable. Newer inventions changed the very dynamics of human life, and the long accepted order came to be challenged.

2. How did science and technology affect the Modern age?

3. What was the most important psychological discovery and how did it impact the age?

4. What is individualism?

Give answers in one word:

1. Modernism emphasized (Individual) experience.
2. Modernism rejected the ... traditions.
3. Freud's theory of ...affected the approach to life.
4. Modern age was marked by a sense of ...against established norms.
5. The post Victorian generation was known as the ... generation.
6. ...pulled the human form apart into geometric shapes.
7. Modern age is clearly defined by a sense of ...
8. Art for art gave way to art for...
9. The generation immediately after the Victorian age regarded its values as ...
10. All that was considered...came to be challenged in the modern age.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

The period between 1914-1950 is generally known as the Modern age in Europe. This period is marked by a general sense of rebellion against all the norms of the Victorian age. With the horrors of War-I looming large, the very approach to human benevolence changed in this age. Also, the newer inventions in the field of science and technology changed the pace of life. There were aircraft, telegraphs, x-ray on one hand and on the other there were Freud, Einstein and Picasso like minds. A combination of such minds and machines transformed the whole world view. Emotions took a backseat, and reason came to be the ruler. This was an age of anxiety and disintegration of values. Art for art gave way to art for life and realism started taking shape.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Modern age	The period from 1914 to 1950 roughly.
Art for life's sake	A movement in response to Art for art's sake. Art for art's sake believed that art has no other purpose besides its aesthetic merit. Art for life's sake emphasized the moral, utilitarian merit of art.
Modernism	A style or movement in the arts that aims to depart significantly from classical and traditional forms.
Post Victorian age	Queen Victoria ruled England from 1837 to 1901; The period after that is known as the post Victorian age because it witnessed the diminishing of the strict moral conservatism that marked the Victorian age.

1.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982. Print.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. California: Stanford University Press, 1991. Print.
- James V. Schall. S. J. *The Modern Age*. Indiana: Saint Augustine's Press, 2011. Print.
- Rainey, Lawrence. *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Print.

❖ ANSWERS:

Check your progress-I:

2. The beginning of Modern age may be traced since the end of Queen Victoria's rule. However, its culmination in a clearly marked way happened in 1914 at the break of the World War and its end may be seen in 1945 with the end of World War-II.

3. Modern age was a period that saw human depravity reach its highest point. From Victorian to the Modern age the world travelled from a period of moral responsibility and domestic propriety to an age of social dissolution and a dismal loss of respect for human emotions. The Victorian age was an age of traditional, conservative values, the modern age revelled in breaking them all and making their own rules.

4. The two world wars were undoubtedly the most powerful influences on this age.

Check your progress- II

- I. Newer inventions in the field of science and technology not only made life more comfortable, they also changed the perception of life. Aircraft, telegraph, X-ray are some of the inventions that made it important to redefine life.
- II. Freud's theory of psychoanalysis turned human perception upside down. The subconscious mind which was hitherto ignored, came to be accepted as the centre of the human mind. Looking inside instead of searching outside became the solution to many problems. Human mind became an object that could be read in a scientific manner; hence, emotions became less celebrated.
- III. Individualism is a philosophy that places individuals at the centre of things. The excessive importance of social control gave way to a sense of complete freedom to individuals in the Modern age. Individualism considers it ethically important to grant paramount status to an individual's interest.

Give answers in one word:

2. Victorian
3. Psychoanalysis
4. Rebellion
5. Lost
6. Picasso
7. Rationalization
8. Life
9. Hypocritical
10. Sacrosanct