
The Evolution of Modernism in English and Malayalam Literature: A Comparative Study

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"What modern art means is that you have to keep finding new ways to express yourself, to express the problems, that there are no settled ways, no fixed approach. This is a painful situation, and modern art is about this painful situation of having no absolutely definite way of expressing yourself." -Louise Bourgeois

Modernism was a literary and cultural international movement that was started in the early twentieth century. In literature, modernism emerged as the reaction to increasing industrialisation, globalisation, new technology and the world wars, especially World War I. Modernism is fostered by experimentation, particularly manipulation of form, and by the realisation that knowledge is not absolute. Modernism evolved as a rebellion against realism and romanticism, and it is used in the field of art and science. This term is used to represent the value and belief in science, technology or the most important social change. In Malayalam literature, modernism evolved as a result of the influence of English literature and as an opposition to the contemporary social backgrounds. In Malayalam literature, modernism is known as the era of the Renaissance.

Modernist poets succeeded in creating a new light of freedom through their works and also brought about a revival in contemporary society. Malayavilasam marked the beginning of modern Malayalam poetry. In the poem, as the title reveals, Sahya Mountain's beauty and superiority are described. This short poem was written by the poet when he came to experience the beauty of Sahya on a fine evening, on his way back to Trivandrum from Chennai. Nalpat Narayana Menon was known as the poet of tears. His poem titled Kannuneer Thulli was a tribute to his dead wife. Heartbroken with the unexpected death of his wife, he wrote Viplavakavyam titled Kannuneer Thulli, which is considered to be his masterpiece original work. The poem is a beautiful combination of human emotions like sorrow and thoughts. Through this poem, he also portrays personal sorrows as the world's agonies built on the base of truth. Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's posthumously published poem Padunna Pishachu (The Devil that Sings,



1949) portrayed the traits of Modernism. This poem is written in the form of an autobiography, like most modern poems that emerge from the alienation and mental dilemmas faced by poets. This poem was also the depiction of the mental dilemma and alienation faced by Changampuzha. The poem is rich with modernist elements like alienation, surreal images, obsessive preoccupation with evil and so on.

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon's Kudiyozhikkal (Eviction) was considered by critics as his magnum opus. This poem made him one of the major influences of the transition from Romanticism to the modern era. The poem has a mythical and epic nature. This poem is an epic of the lonely self-pity of the landowners in Kerala. The landowner begins to realise that the future doesn't belong to him, but instead, it belongs to the tenants. It is not easy for a landowner, who wants to unite with the downtrodden, to break the invisible chain of his feudal lineage. This poem is the answer to many questions of subtle political issues. It is a truly inspirational self-examination of events that happened during his time.

G. Kumara Pillai's Mugdham is an ode that expresses the subtleties of the senses. The beauty of nature is also expressed with nuances in the poem. Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri was considered a prominent figure in modern Malayalam poetry. Akkitham's Irupatham Noottandinte Ithihasam is a protest against the rebellious contemporary social life. The poet opines that individuals urge for war and terrorism is sowing disaster in the world, and poverty exists on the other side of the society. The poet suggests through his poem that only those who wipe the tears of others can experience true bliss in their lives. The domination of evil in the contemporary world hurts the poet. Modern-day political parties and leaders establish their power by sacrificing the lives of their supporters. The miserable condition of mothers and orphans on the streets hurts the poet's heart.

Sugathakumari's poems are the ode which portrays imagination and emotions. She introduced a new experimental universe through her poems. Her Gajendramoksham is a self-revelatory poem, and the poem upholds the modernistic vibes. The depiction of the elephant in this poem reveals that ego consciousness results in the downfall of an individual. When the elephant in the poem undergoes downfall, he seeks God's help by abandoning his ego and thus experiences the bliss of being with God.

Modernism was a defining touchstone in the history of English literature, altering it like never before. It started roughly in 1890 and went on up to the year 1950. It was a paramount movement that had profound implications upon the social, political, religious, ethical, moral, economic, and literary spheres of the society of England and beyond in more ways than one. The era of modernism in English literature was marked by the exploration of the stream of consciousness technique, interior monologue and free



association. The modernism in English literature arose out of many historical and social factors swirling or hovering around in the society of England and Europe, thick and fast. Modernism was powered by various events and incidents unfolding in the English society, which was related to radical shifts in the cultural composition of the society and also linked to the emergence of aesthetic patterns of divergent tone and tenor. The society of England was in decay, and there was disruption taking place in different fields of life. This disarray, so perennial in English society, got reflected through the literary works produced out of the period of modernism. This era of modernism was synonymous with pessimism and relativism of the highest point.

The major events that brought about Modernism in English literature include the development of industrialized societies, the horrors of the two World Wars, the fragmentation of society along racial, class, and gender lines, the movement away from organized religions, an increasing focus on individualism, the loss of faith in God, governments, and human goodness, the segmentation of behavioral and thought patterns, a sense of desolation and disorientation, widespread societal depression, feelings of hopelessness, and a complete disconnection from an orderly way of life. The other reasons that accelerated the onset of Modernism in English literature are the decadence and degeneration that set into European society, the inflation that generated out of Germany, the starvation that went on in Austria, and the revolutions that broke out in Hungary and Russia. The First War resulted in people suffering in a substantial manner, and there was a terminal decline in all parts of the European world. At this point, people lost faith in all systems, structures, entities, institutional frameworks and mechanisms, and they wanted to create something new out of the turbulence that got entrenched in the society. Even the very consciousness of the people was shattered and battered beyond any measure because of the despicable destruction arising out of the chaos and turmoil of the First World War.

The monumental work of this period of modernism that, in a discernible manner, accommodated all these confused trends and tendencies whipped up in the society was T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The *Waste Land* does have within its fold trends and tendencies which are in sync with the beginning of modernism. The poem is renowned for its chaotic wavelength, anarchy-orientated ways, disorientated social system, disintegrated moralistic patterns of the society, fragmented belief systems, discordant identities, intermingled cultural fissures, segmented political dos and don'ts, the abject brutalisation of the society and its consequences, the marginalisation and penalisation of political, linguistic and cultural minorities, and the reflection of the confusion so prevalent in the society. The pathetic state of the world



at large, the rootlessness encountered by many, the crisis in identity inculcated by humans, the rat-hole existence experienced by the people of the world, the onset of the winter of discontentment felt by the people of various castes and creeds, the perpetuation of flagrant injustices throughout the world, and the sense of rupture so synonymous with human life in general are also depicted in the poem. The work clearly charts out the picture of a society slipping into a dark chasm of no return, with all its elements pulling in different directions or working in diametrically opposed ways and means.

The predominant literary figures of modernism can be categorised into two, belonging to the poetic and fictional fields. The authors born out of modernism are James Joyce, William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf. The poets who dotted the landscape of modernism are T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden and Robert Frost. The literary works related to Modernism do have certain inalienable characteristics attached to them such as the radical disruptions incorporated into the flow of narrative, the emphasis given to introspection and internal thought processes of the characters, the stress put on the use of language rather than artistic exploration, the limelight kept on the alienation felt, isolation undergone, confusion experienced and detachment inculcated in the characterization and plot, the highlight put upon the rhythm and fragments of everyday language, the focus upon a narrative style which was inward looking and interpretative analysis related to struggles gone through by individuals in terms of their inner selves, the extensive use of symbolism and setting, the importance shown towards free, unrestricted, unrestrained and unconstrained way of thinking, the insertion of truths from multiple perspectives and angles. The two significant literary aspects that got shaped out of modernism are stream of consciousness associated with the unearthing of characters thought processes perfected in the literary works of James Joyce's "Ulysses" and T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the interior monologue related to the organised sort of rational thoughts spelt out by the characters.

Modernism in English literature had been necessitated by the changing patterns of the society, such as its ups and downs, ebbs and flows, commotion and discord, economic downturn and cultural conflicts, gender discrimination and decline in different domains of life, hopelessness and fears, confrontations and moral decay, radicalisation and divisions, segregation and fragmentation, inflation and deflation, and inhumanity and lack of direction. Modernism laments the fragmentation and meaninglessness of life, while postmodernism celebrates the fragmentation and meaninglessness of life.

Features of Modern Poetry:



I) Modern poetry is written in simple language, the language of everyday speech and even sometimes in dialect. II) Modern poetry is mostly sophisticated as a result of the experience of the modern age, for instance, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". III) Modern poetry breaks from traditional or conventional methods. IV) Alienation – The poet is alienated from the reader as a result of the alienation of the modern man. V) Fragmentation – The modern poem is sometimes fragmented like a series of broken images, like "The Waste Land". VI) Modern poetry is highly intellectual; it is written from the mind of the poet, and it addresses the mind of the reader, like the poems of T. S. Eliot. VII) It is interested in the ugly side of life and in taboo subjects like drug addiction, crime, prostitution and some other subjects. VIII) Modern poetry is pessimistic as a result of the bad condition of man in many parts of the world. IX) Modern poetry is suggestive; the poem may indicate different meanings to different readers. X) Modern poetry is cosmopolitan. It appeals to man everywhere and at every time because it deals with the problems of humanity. XI) Experimentation is one of the important characteristic features of modern poetry. Poetry to break different grounds, i.e., to find new forms, new language and new methods of expression. XII) It is irregular, written without meter and rhyme scheme and sometimes written in prose like the prose poem. XIII) Interest in politics and the political problems of the age. XIV) Interest in psychology and in the subconscious mind. Many poets wrote unconsciously under the effect of wine or drugs. XV) Irregularity of form – Modern poetry is mainly written in free verse and prose (the prose poem). XVI) Ambiguity – Most of the modern poetry is ambiguous for many reasons. XVII) Modern poetry is interested in myth and especially Greek myth. XVIII) Interest in the problems of the average man and the lowest class of society is evident in modern poetry. XIX) Modern poetry is not viewed as a didactic work. XX) Modern poetry takes a deviation from divinity. XXI) Modern poetry gives importance to scientific fields and rationality. XXII) Modern poetry depicts passion for humanity. XXIII) Usage of symbols, imagery, illusion and multiple associations of words are evident in modern poetry. XXIV) Modern poetry portrays the transformation in Western society, including urbanisation, industrialisation, and World War I. XXV) Juxtaposition of ideas and usage of irony and metaphors are evident in modern poetry.

The emergence of modernism in Malayalam literature was the revival that evolved due to the influence of Western literature. As a result of colonial education, science and technology and literature, especially fiction, have developed. The introduction of the dictionary and modern edition of grammar had wide influence on modern literature. The valuable support given by Western missionaries for the growth and development of Malayalam literature was incredible. Benjamin Bailey, Hermund Gundert, Joseph Peet,



and Arnos Pathiri will always remain as memorable dignitaries due to their contributions. The growth of Malayalam prose is due to the invention of printing. Until then the Malayalam literature was surrounded by poems and epic poems; later it extended and focused on different creations such as translations, world literature, classical writing and so on. In the translation works of other languages, the famous works of Sanskrit and Bengali literature were mainly included. The Ayilyam Thirunal has translated Kalidasa Shankuntalam into Malayalam, which is titled Bhasa Shakuntalam.

The translation of Abhigyanam Shakuntalam in 1882 by the Kerala Varma Valya Koyithampuran was the main attraction, and various circulations of the Malayalam magazines had become the new influence of Malayalam literature. Meanwhile, magazines like Vidyavinodini of C.P. Achutha Menon, Bhashaposhini of Malayala Manorama and Rasikarajani of Appan Thampuran made the criticism and analysis of the world of literature, and also it gave an opportunity or inspiration for the new writers to get into this field. As per the impact of criticism and analysis, the writers got a chance to know the golden critics of Western literature. Due to the influential result of Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, geniuses such as Kumaranasan and Thakazhi got the chance to get involved in the modern way of writing. There has been a great transformation from short stories, usually written in leisure time, to make a presentation of serious life experiences during the modern period. The exposure to the works of world literature geniuses such as Maupassant and Chekhov inspired literary legends such as Thakazhi, Basheer and so on to write novels and short stories. Being known as the activist of realism, Basheer and others got an opportunity to grow and move beyond the realism. The contributions made by the historical works of C.V. Raman Pillai in Malayalam novels were remarkable. Drama, as the popular art form, has gained great growth and significance during the modern period.

Poets such as Kumaranasan, Ulloor, and Vallathol have changed the history of poetry by giving a new standard and direction of knowledge to the modern Malayalam poems. The sonnet, the ode, the elegy, the dramatic monologue and other similar forms began to be written in Malayalam. The works of V.C. Balakrishna Panikkar, A.R. Rajaraja Varma, Kumaran Asan, Ulloor and Vallathol established this trend. The modernist trend in 20th-century Western poetry may be seen in the works of N.V. Krishna Warrior, M. Govindan, Akkitham and Ayyappa Paniker. A.R. Rajaraja Varma's Malayavilasam has made the individual experience of natural beauty. Kumaran Asan's Veenapoovu (1907) has created a new experience among the poem lovers. Kumaran Asan has made drastic changes with his visionary poem in the history of poems and also stepped out of the social works and made revolutionary changes there too.



Poems like Nalini (1911), Leela (1914), Chinthavishtayaya Seetha (1919), Karuna (1923), and Chandalabhikshuki help us to view the face of modern Malayalam poems.

The poem Light of Asia by Edwin Arnold became the reason for the greatest contribution of Kumaranasan's work Sri Buddha Charitham because Western literature has influenced the modern poets for such poetry. Modernism in poetry doesn't remain idle in the field of literature alone, but it has created a huge social change, and this change was highlighted in contemporary society. Even though Ulloor remained as the father of neo-classic poetry, he also accepted modern changes too, and his political works became the modern face of mythological poems. Vallathol's poetry remained as reflections of nationalism and generated Keralites thirst for freedom and social changes remained as never-ending volcanic fire, as a result of the influence of modernism. Familiarity with Western literature resulted in V.C. Balakrishna Panicker's work Oru Vilasam. Vallathol's influence resulted in Nalapat Narayana Menon's mourning poetry Kannuneerthulli. Apart from mourning poetry, Kannuneerthulli is a contribution of a deep vision of life, and it proves how we can make impermanence in life into permanence.

G. Sankara Kurup has established his place among Malayalam poets with his new phenomenal ideas and inimitable poetic style. Mystic legacy and symbolic, poetic style have provided a different experience for G's poetry. Sooryakanthi, Ente Veli, Chandanakkattil, Innu njan nale nee, Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali translation, etc., gave national attention to Malayalam poetry, and G became the first recipient of the Jnanpith Award in Malayalam literature. In 1930, poet P. Kunhiraman Nair arrived as a moonlight in Malayalam poetry. Kunhiraman Nair remained as an immortal in the poetic world, and he made all the poetry lovers as the travellers in the lotus pinnacle. As a lover of Kathakali among the Malayalam poets, P. Kunhiraman Nair stands as the new face of modern poetry. Edappally and Changampuzha gave newness to Malayalam poetry. Even though Edappally Raghavan Pillai's poem Maninadam became his own farewell poem, the significance of his poem prevails still in this age. Changampuzha's poems, such as Bashpanjali, Sankalpakanti, and Ramanan, have made a play with words and given a new poetic experience of beauty. Ramanan, which was written with a mind-numbing after the death of Edappally Raghavan Pillai, made the revolution among Malayalam poetry lovers. It was the best-seller of Malayalam literature. The gracefulness of phraseology can be heard blooming in his poetry. Deep visions of life and hard realities of life became the subjects of Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon's poetry. Vyloppilli made poetic subjects starting from delightful short poems to Kannikoythu, Makarakoythu, Kanneerppadam, Vida, Mambazham, Sarpa Kotha, and Yugaparivarthanam; such poetic



collaboration of his brought many changes of age to the Malayalam poetry and remains as eternal spring. Apart from the beauty of poetry, Vyloppilli aims at a deeper vision of life; social changes and agricultural development and culture of Kerala are also significant in his poetry.

Modernism, as a literary and cultural movement, brought about a profound transformation in both English and Malayalam literature. Modernism redefined literature by challenging conventions and embracing a new way of thinking. It reflected the struggles of individuals in an evolving world, portraying existential dilemmas, social transformations, and the quest for meaning. The study of modernism in English and Malayalam literature highlights its lasting impact, proving that literature is a dynamic force that evolves with time, mirroring the realities of human experience.

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