INTELLECTUAL TRENDS OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

6

You read in the previous chapter about the major streams of human thought in the early modern world. The 19th century saw new patterns in the thought process of the people. The intellectual developments of the 19th and early 20th century world were largely dominated by the ideas and concepts that had their roots in Europe.

This chapter will introduce you to the major developments in 1) philosophy, literature, and art, and 2) science and technology, which influenced the cultural, social and political movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Decline of the Enlightenment

By the end of the 18th century, the ideals of the Enlightenment no longer inspired the imagination of a group of philosophers in Europe. Men of letters and artists, too, began to doubt the essential tenets of the Enlightenment. Philosophers began to question whether rationality, scientific temperament, and logical thought of the Enlightenment were really good to mankind.

This skepticism regarding the ideals of the Enlightenment expressed itself in two ways: Romanticism and Idealism. In fact, both these streams of thought had their source in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Subsequently, these developed into movements affecting political and cultural life, including literature and art. Germany, France, and England were the three regions where the impact of the new thoughts was felt first.

The basis of Romanticism and idealism lay in the ideas developed in the Age of Enlightenment. Discuss.

The Romantic Movement in 19th Century Europe

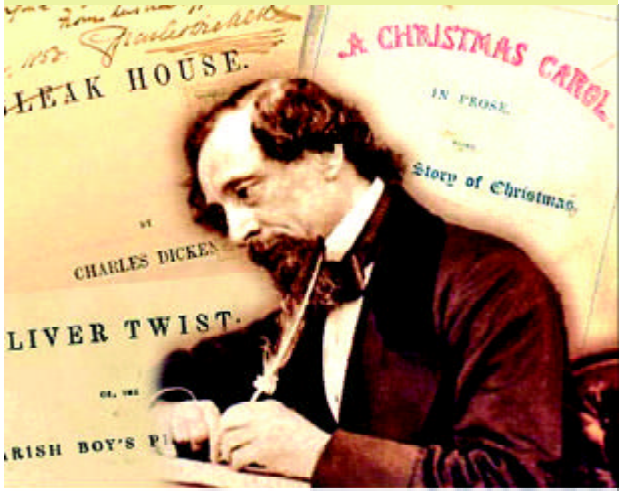
Romanticism was the most significant development of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in philosophy, literature and art. It began first as a continuation of, and later as a reaction to the Enlightenment in Europe.

Romanticism was a break with the ideals enshrined by the Enlightenment. It was a revolt against classicism in the art and literature of the Enlightenment. Thus, it questioned the primacy of Reason, Order and Science. Instead, Romanticism emphasized the subjective, the imaginative, the personal, the emotional and the spontaneous. It stood for the precedence of emotion over reason, and senses over intellect. The interests of an observer would influence his observations. The varying interests of individuals have a role in such observations. The emotions elicited by an object would be felt or experienced differently by the observers. The beauty of nature was to be the guiding principle.

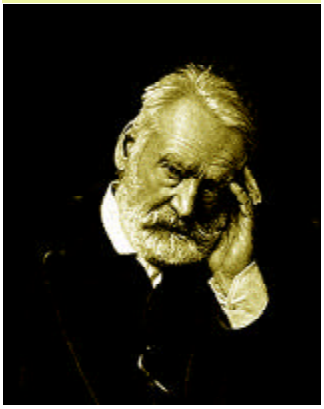
William Wordsworth

Beauty of nature, romance, and freedom of thought were the themes dealt with by the Romanticists. These became the favoured themes of men of letters in all European languages. It was also during this period that novel as a literary form became popular. The novels of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) of England told the stories of the miserable life led by children who had to work in the mines and factories, and by people living in the slums of the industrial cities. The English poet William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850), in a poem, 'Tintern Abbey', described his intense romance with nature. The 'Solitary Reaper' who sings and reaps corn in the field and

Charles Dickens



Victor Hugo



Eugene Delacroix

John Constable

'Lucy Gray' who is lost for ever in the solitude of a beautiful landscape are two other famous poems of Wordsworth. The celebration of nature, which visualises God's presence in all the phenomena of nature, formed the main theme of the Romantic poets.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885), the French poet, dramatist and novelist, was an important figure of French Romanticism. His *Les Miserables* influenced people all over the world.

Artists of the Romantic Movement preferred landscape painting to the earlier tradition of the Greek or Roman themes in the classical style.

The French artist Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and the British artist John Constable (1776-1837) typify this shift in artistic expressions.

In architecture, there was a conscious attempt at going back to the Gothic style of Medieval Europe. It is best represented by the construction of the British Houses of Parliament in London.

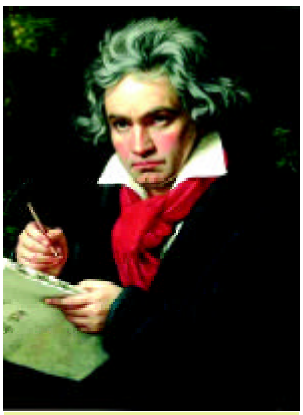
European Music of the age of Romanticism reached its height in Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), the German composer and pianist.

With the birth of the Romantic Movement, there was a new emphasis upon individualism, human rights, and the value of human emotions and imagination. Apart from its influence in literature and art, Romanticism began to affect, and be affected by, the political and economic perceptions of 19th century Europe. Moreover, there was a renewed interest in the Middle Ages, and in discovering past cultures and epochs.

Painting drawn by Eugene Delacroix

Painting drawn by John Constable

British Parliament


Ludwig Van Beethoven

Friedrich Hegel

In politics, Romanticism inspired nationalism in Europe. It developed as a movement to assert the sovereignty of the state and self-determination of the people.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who advocated a philosophy of the state, was the supreme spokesman of this political imagination.

Romanticism was the triumph of emotion over reason and imagination over intellect - examine.

Liberalism

Closely allied to nationalism was the political philosophy known as Liberalism. It was mainly an expression of the political sentiments of the Middle Class. In Britain, where the Industrial Revolution created an active Middle Class by the middle of the 19th century, Parliamentarianism was gaining ground. Its spokesmen demanded a constitution, a bill of rights, and adult suffrage.

Realism

A new trend in literature and art began in the second half of the 19th century, emphasizing the desire to present things as they were. Artists and men of letters approached their themes and questions not on the basis of emotions. They stood for their objective or accurate portrayal. Therefore, this style in art and literature has been called Realism.

Realism was a reaction against the Romanticism of the late 18th and 19th centuries. This change of style could be attributed to two causes. 1) the rise of modern science as a form of human thought, and 2) the disillusionment caused by the failure of the Revolutions of 1848 in different parts of Europe.

The progress of science in the 19th century accelerated the decline of the Romantic Movement. The increasing importance

Lord Tennyson

Robert Browning

Immanuel Kant

attached to machines, as if these would substitute human labour, implied trivializing human abilities. Tracing the origin of species to evolution brought about changes in the belief in the role of God in Creation. These challenged the romantic vision of litterateurs. The Realists argued that things were to be presented as they were without being influenced by imagination. Alfred Lord Tennyson, Malthew Arnold and Robert Browning represented this movement of Realism in English literature. Realism was the result of the progress of science and the political developments of the 19th century.

German Idealism

In the second half of the eighteenth century, there took place a revival of Idealism. Idealism is a branch of philosophy that gave primacy to mind and took matter only as secondary. It stressed the role of the ideal or the spiritual. German philosophers were the chief exponents of Idealism. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Hegel (1770-1831) gave a new lease of life to the Idealist philosophy. The German Idealists argued that Idea could transform socio-economic and political life. This was different from the earlier stress on spiritualism and denial of the importance of socio-economic and political life.

Positivism

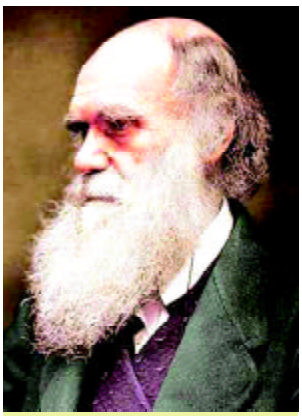
While Kant and Hegel argued that Idea was derived from mind, another group of philosophers called the Positivists argued that material circumstances determined ideas. This was a departure from the earlier emphasis on spiritualism.

Materialism

Basing himself on the arguments of the Positivists, the German Philosopher Karl Marx developed a new theory. While Hegel believed that Idea transformed the world, Marx thought that material forces transformed the world. Marx believed that while philosophers had so far only interpreted the world, what was more important was to change the world. Marx contended that philosophy must become a reality, for which man should transform the world. You have already studied the political and economic ideas of Marx in an earlier chapter.

Science in the 19th Century

The 19th century was an age of discoveries in science and technological advancements. Different branches of Physics and Medical Science made great strides. With the growth of industrialization, technology was pressed into in the service of the common man in Europe.


Charles Darwin

Gordon Childe

The Theory of Evolution was the single most significant doctrine that changed man's outlook in the 19th century. It argued that all living organisms developed from simple early forms. It argued further that no species was changeless.

It was the English naturalist Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) who presented the hypothesis of evolution as a theory. His arguments were published under the titles *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871.

Great strides were made in genetics by Rev. Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), an Austrian monk.

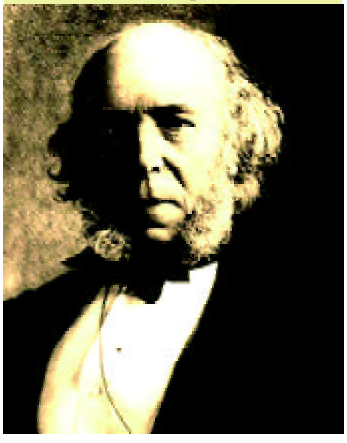
The theory of evolution influenced not only the biological sciences, but all branches of knowledge, including the humanities and social sciences. It questioned the notion of a created world and offered that of an evolving world.

The concept of evolution brought about fundamental changes in history, sociology, and anthropology. The application of the theory of evolution in the social sciences is often referred to as Social Darwinism. The theory of 'survival of the fittest', implicit in the theory of evolution, has often been used to justify Imperialism and Western dominance in Asia and Africa. It was also abused by the Nazis for justifying the idea of racial superiority.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), a British Sociologist, considered the theory of evolution very useful in the study of society.

V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957), an Australian archeologist, used the theory of evolution for explaining the primitive historical and cultural contexts.

Herbert Spencer



Scientific innovations were helpful in explaining changes in history and society. Analyse this statement on the basis of Enlightenment and modern Scientific Revolution.

20th Century Science and New Patterns of Thought

The influence of science on man and society has been very explicit in the 20th century. The Science of the 20th century was no longer a lone pursuit of certain scientists or laboratories. It involved many disciplines, many people, and many nations.

Max Plank and Albert Einstein

Physics witnessed great strides in the early 20th century. The Quantum Theory of Max Planck (1858-1947) and the Special Theory of Relativity of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) represent the new heights in modern science.

Ernest Rutherford (1871-1937) discovered that atoms, the smallest particles of matter, could be split up (i.e., nuclear fission) whereupon energy would be released. It was discovered subsequently that just as in nuclear fission, nuclear fusion would also lead to the releasing of energy. Though this could be put to several peaceful uses, the nuclear bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki show the deadliest use ever of this new technology. These discoveries contributed to further developments not only in science but also in social sciences.

The potential of such theories of modern science for military applications led to the direct involvement of the state in science and technology in the 20th century.

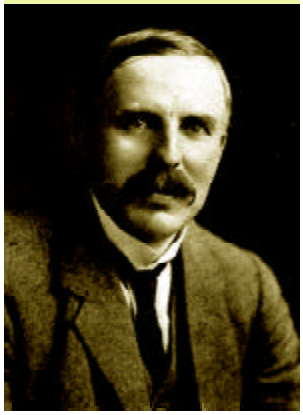
New Trends in Literary Criticism and Philosophy

Human life in the 20th century differed markedly from that of the 19th century as a result of the revolutions in industry, science, and technology. As a result, literature sought new ways of expressions and styles.

Two important movements in philosophy and literary criticism of the 20th century are Modernism and Post-Modernism.

Ever since the Enlightenment, there developed a sense of confidence among the educated middle class about man's mastery over nature and the world. Yet, by the beginning of the 20th century, Europe and North America witnessed a reaction to the evil effects of the Industrial Revolution, and the miseries of urban life. Such resentments found expression in art and literature, too. This movement in literature and art is generally known as Modernism. The Modernists in art and literature reacted

Ernest Rutherford



Noam Chomsky

sharply to the classical concepts and evolved abstract patterns and styles.

After the 1960s, some philosophers, linguists, and social scientists started examining the problem of the meaning of the written word. They contested the traditional definitions of meaning of the written text or literary composition or artistic production. It began to be argued that a text carries multiple layers of meanings, and that multiple readings of the text are possible. Such contestations have been labeled Post-Modernism. Many advocates of this line of inquiry affirm that post-modernism is more of a living condition than a set of theories.

Some leading figures of this movement are Michel Foucault (1926-1984), a French philosopher and historian; Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a French philosopher born in Algeria; and Noam Chomsky (born 1928), an American linguist and political philosopher.

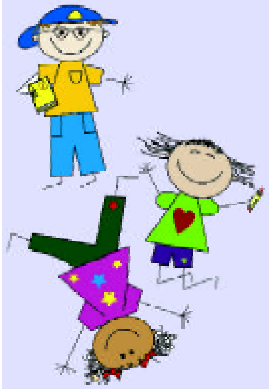
A very notable achievement in Science after the Second World War is in Space Research. Such researches made possible vehicles that could defy the Earth's gravitation and go out to the Outer Space. Man landed on the Moon and sent space-shuttles to explore other planets of the Universe. It has been made possible today to launch man-made satellites for studying the natural resources and the changes in climate. The recent explosionary developments in telecommunication is also directly related to these researches.

Exciting progress has been achieved in biotechnology as well. It has been proved that life can be created through cloning.

The progress in information technology has brought knowledge literally at the finger-tip of man. The application of this branch of science in the field of education has proved to be very effective.

Prepare a table showing the different intellectual trends and their proponents.

Activities



- Prepare an essay on the changes in the cultural and political thoughts in France, Germany and England following the changes in the mode of production as a result of Industrial Revolution.
- Organize a seminar on the changes in human thought brought about by developments in the fields of science and technology in the 19th and 20th centuries.