

## **A trajectory of ideas from Enlightenment to Postmodernism**

**Abir Choudhury**

**Jalpaiguri, West Bengal**

**India**

### **Abstract:**

A trajectory of ideas from the period of Enlightenment to postmodernism steps ahead through many stages of human evolution in its sociolinguistic peripheries. Humans' craving for better life and existence in this world makes himself dependent that produces a series of conflicts in course between the self and authority resulting in degradation or up gradation of human soul that evidently marked a great influence on his ideas and activities. His ceaseless work and various scientific invention empowered him to step ahead even towards nothingness, towards a collaged culture, a cosmopolitan existence of human life which is not limited by bond and boundary of any particular nation or race and this predominantly modifies and regulates the tastes of the literary world as a whole.

**Key words:** ideas, scientific inventions, self-dependence, enlightenment, modernism, postmodernism, collaged culture.

### **1. Introduction**

Enlightenment refers to an intellectual movement which is invariably a synonymous term to the totality of the age of reason that meticulously encompasses facts and fads of the validity of the philosophy of rationalism in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a whole. The eras mirrored the reflection of human reason and its supremacy over old ideas and thoughts oozed out of the much believed and followed disciplines of the holy Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The turn to human reason conveniently gave birth to a new approach to life and thoughts in the mastered hands of Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibnitz, Benedict De Spinoza, Voltaire, Rousseau and such many others. They believed in the existence of God but relay on the Man. Good and evil, they advocated, were the result of man's own doings and thus morality was not confined and explained by the agents of God. The then scholars of Europe and America grabbed this philosophy of reason in the cloth of Deism as a new light to lime over the hue of Catholicism and in place Paganism, a mild Christianity fitted to be the newest choice of the people of class, and its effects soon reached

beyond the seas as Scot David Hume said that the term ‘Enlightenment’ could be much explained in the purview of Scotland and French than England itself.

## **2. Man’s interdependence in changing the ideas**

Man’s interdependence took him away from his dependence on the Bible, the Church and the State to believe rather in Newton, the inventor of ‘Natural Law’ as we find in Pope, “God said, Let Newton be, and all was light.” Man gradually could forsake his old habits, manners and beliefs and a ‘self’ grew matured in himself to dissipate the darkness of mind and soul for the creation of an ideal world free of the direct authority and intervention of God Himself. As Immanuel Kant in his book sees man’s dependence on the Bible and teachings as nothing but the sheer immaturity and relying on himself as a trajectory towards maturity. The dogmas, evidently relying on ‘Reason’ took place and thus a huge metamorphosis of human soul and self-journeyed towards the centuries ahead with hardly any intention to stop.

## **3. Different scientific inventions as modifiers of ideas**

A Man, once Nature’s puppet, by his continuous trial and error to make his life better and comfortable invented many of the ways to stand against the crude natural tyranny like storm, flood, earthquake, life taking diseases etc. Science enabled him to know his power lies in himself specially when a teacher, an orator, a philosopher and a scientist like Francis Bacon advocated scientific approach to all enquiries. Several inventions of the Enlightenment period such as the invention of Gabriel Fahrenheit’s first mercury Thermometer, Benjamin Franklin’s Lightning rod, James Hargreaves’ Spinning Jenny, James Watt’s Steamed Engine, Edmund Cartwright’s Power Loom, Edward Jenner’s signature invention a smallpox vaccination and Alessandro Volta’ Electrical Battery and discovery of Methane Gas put scholars and even the common people for sometimes in confusion about their existence and identity on the earth and soon recovered to role themselves towards modernity, the name we critically give to the preceding years. As there was a significant change in the science and technology the rate of death decreases, production increases, colonial trades spread and the people of a class started to indulge themselves in various immoral activities which contradicted the ideas of Catholic Christianity.

## **5. Change in Socio-political system and human ideas**

Relying on the new thoughts and ideas upturned many of the then established socio- political systems and structures of the pre-enlightenment period i.e. the authority of king or queen as the representative of God had been denied. All these rolling changes put a breaking and shaking effect even on the minds of common mass and grounded the field of French Revolution in 1789 and subsequently the execution of Louis XVI and thus initiated the end of monarchical system in French. Whether this execution was good or bad is still a

matter of crucial question but it was man who reasoned or rationalized the fact and even made Napoleon to have had adventure to establish his authority over the European Continent for pretty long years till his ultimate defeat in 1815.

When this enlightenment enlightened the inner self of men of the then century ahead, his manner, taste, his habits and habitats and above all the approach towards life started to have gradual change. He learned to take risk of his life for the sake of his identity leading to early mono-mania. Once his life which was a proficient prospects of the priests and church, started slipping its reliance from religious institution to himself and thus a set of conflicts aroused in almost in all segments of the society resulting to the perfect liberal social order or the early establishment of democracy, a new governing body of the society and country thus erupted in many of the parts of Europe specially in Western Europe and America. Monarchical and Colonial system unquestionably suffocated under the realm of the new ideas in the stream of humanism that blew its bugle in 1778 in America with the lips of Thomas Paine and thus practically today's U.S.A could be sketched in the world map. The test of freedom and liberty were served even beyond the seas in the farfetched Asian sub-continent and the British colonial idealism started to feel frail and feeble and many of the small powers peeped to raise slogan against the mighty British authority and thus the trodden ones proceeded towards freedom from the bondage of any established orders.

#### **4. Ideas reflected in its Enlightenment literature**

The new change equally influenced the literary world and literary world had a great impact on the minds of the people of the period. The Enlightenment literature may be roughly taken from 1650 to 1800 A.D. Though the main progenitors of the Enlightenment era were Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, there were many such others who contributed in a great deal for the acceptance of the change as universal phenomena to the century ahead and out of them to be mentioned the name of Moliere in French, Milton in English and Goethe in Germans. Moliere's signature work *Le Misanthrope* criticized the upper class order and their vain attempts towards less important basis of life and term. The late seventeenth century of England witnessed the protest against God through Satan's fall from Paradise which perfumed the blooming of reasons and tried to establish man's authority over godliness. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* rightly portrayed the flavour of the age, ideas and romanticism. The Enlightenment period was a fertile ground which produced as much satirical literature to poke the Institution and the State in a right way and for which Voltaire (in French) and Jonathan Swift are to be credited.

## **6. Ideas in its Modern note**

With the craze of sequential change of universal ideas and thoughts Marshall Berman sees the term “Modernity” on the chronological order started with the Early Modernity (1500 to 1789), Classical Modernity (1789 to 1900) and the Late Modernity (1900 to 1989) as a whole while discussing the trend and test of ‘Modernity’ and here we can be judiciously assigned to interpret that the age of Reason being an inseparable back ground and a part of the customary tradition of evaluation of cult and culture cut the ribbon for the gate way of the ‘Modernity’ and subsequently Post Modernity with keeping a validated difference within their own peripheries. Thus the concept of Modernism nourished first in Vienna during the years from 1890 to 1990 and got its adolescent in French, maturity in Germany and Italy and post maturity in England and U.S.A. The ideas and styles of Modernism prevalently opposed in post Enlightenment literature, architect, music and paintings. The 19th century text of symmetrical and rhythmical compose was challenged by the non-conventional ideas of dissimilarities. Thus the direct projections of matter were not in vogue and in place abstractionism plays the key role to the painter, poet, performer and producers in the Postmodern era. In the architectural view, the plain geometrical showcase was admitted in lieu of the jargoned ornamental built and structure. Literature also forsook traditional realism and accepted the experimental works of the time and stage. The high exponents of the period who characterized and classified the age and stage of human value and validity of ‘self’ were T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust and Rainer Maria Rilke. It was something how we thought about the life and livings not how we presented.

## **7. Ideas in the discourse of Postmodernism**

And the idea of very modernism at its late outset at around 1980 onwards collided with the term Post Modernism which is much a debated term to date to post mortem evocatively by the scholars. Though presumably the beginning of the new ideas has been taken as of 1981 but it will not be judicious enough to demarcate the periods by date and year, specially on the perspective of the scholars of literature rather much suited the architectural historians invariably after Samuel Beckett and his contemporaries as commentators like Margaret Drabble found the new concept of postmodernism as an architectural continuation of the much munched modernism itself. Post Modernism sees the influence of ‘Mass’ evident in almost all phases in the culture and society. Common merged with the uncommon, boundaries between the actuality and mimicry swayed away towards the conflict and confusion in mind of men about their real identity. Concept of recycling, copy of copy came in vogue and thus the ideal perpetually denied making us more baffling about the

acceptance of real or real-like as ‘Venice’ in Las Vegas and ‘Venice’ in Italy and ‘Pyramid’ in Las Vegas and ‘Pyramid’ in Egypt.

Intertextuality is one of the major salient features of Post Modernism as it amalgamated styles, forms, classes media and conventions. Thus there remains no distinction between the High Art like opera, ballet, classical music, classical literature, art cinema and the popular culture of low art like art of advertising, pop music, genre films, television, pulp fiction or trashy novels, pornography and music videos. Concept of Hybridization of style and genres on the other hand engulfs the mind of people towards a virtual world of simulation with the cost of minimum time and space. Many of the travel agents like British Air Ways, Delta Air Lines , United Airlines, American Airlines, Jet Air ways and so on and so many ,with their supersonic jet propulsion offer various discounts on their tickets that enhances the affordability and resultantly the globe become very small as a single home for many of the common people even. Concept of E-book and fast downloading scheme, 24 hours open city with fast moving escalator and hi- tech- malls, E. wallet , Home shopping, social sites like Facebook, Tweeter etc have upturned many of the ideas of the modernity and continually making a great confusion towards the nothingness and we thus proceed to the Post Modernism or Post Modernism.

In Post modernity, as Jean Baudrillard observes American dreams rightly portrayed through the image as shown in T.V and cinema. Here, adding to that the invention of Anroid smart phone or high definition mobile along with the easy and cheap internet connectivity has have a great impact even on the bed room life of the mass which connecting them to the age of virtuality as more real.

In post modernity, ‘grand narratives’ style of literature, as Lyotard sees, has been abandoned to much extent. People find question in the narration of absolute truth. Post modernism thus believes in inclusiveness in lieu of exclusiveness, works on availability rather than scarcity, plays on superficiality rather than gravity of the matter. On way of change and transformation and transfusion Parody has been replaced by Pastiche, an imitated art form formed from different sources of literature, theatre, music, film, architecture of other origins. As in literature we find even after Arthur Conan Doyle Sherlock Homes series has been written and the shows go on, in music Mozart has rightly been characterized by Charles Rosen, in cinema carrying the post modern tradition Charles Band’s 3D film Metalstorm: The Destruction of Jared-Syn nicely pastiches the film series of George Lucas’s Star Wars . Elitist thus merged into common, common into elitist, no brand is thus idealized.

## Conclusion

Trajectory of the ideas starting from the Enlightenment period has never been an easy task on the part of the human being on his way to today's attainment in every step and stage of life and livelihood for which he is to compromise, collide and be collaged with his surroundings into which he has always been thrown to make a better world for him and future generation. Besides many contradictions and conflicts flight of ideas thus visibly or invisibly goes on up the period of the age of Reason, modernity, Post Modernity and the forthcoming eras to bear with through pathogenic experiment of his behavior and approach towards life. Political conflicts subsequently rebellious movements, depletion of established system, natural disasters along with man's endless sufferings and weak beliefs in God, increased population and unfulfilled demand of foods and goods, technological advancement, shorten of time and space leading to a small globe, arisen of new capitalist society, emergence of India and Pakistan as nuclear states, prepare him as more complex and abstractive that evidently showcases the character of the ages ahead. Attaining perfection has now become a mania, a universal nature of human character that never allows him to sit idle. Possible we are gradually proceeding towards a massive holocaust, towards a Utopia, towards the fantasy of Harry Potter or on the bullock cart for having backward journey to cave age ---- is now a big question, a big promising crisis. Perhaps, this is the stream of intuition that dwells in the sub conscious of the human soul of ideas and thoughts which prompted him to invent nuclear (New Clear) weapons to annihilate the nation or to show the muscle, on the other hand nuclear medicine to save lives. Perhaps, this is the crisis of identity which fuels the ISIS for killing the humanity mercilessly on the contrary other Swedish Academy is awarding Nobel Peace prize 2015 to National Dialogue Quartet *"for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011"* that is how the juxtaposition of the course and conflicts always has been the main traits of the running age. Today's man is really confused at the morning, satiated at noon and again confused in the evening about almost everything that comes on his way, a sort of aimed journey turns to the aimlessness with only leaving us with a long cherished prognosis of hope to the making of a better world (?) for all.

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