

Spatial-temporal Mapping of Modernism in Metropolitan Centres of Europe With Special Focus on London

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Abstract

The literature that emerged as the Modernist canon is essentially a literature of cities in many senses than one. It is created conceived and propagated there. It draws upon the city life gets influenced by the chaos and crowd. Literature has a relationship with cities as most of the literature as we know has been created shaped in the heart of metropolitans or centres of civilisation. Modernist art has special relation with cities. Cities are playing the role of cultural museum and novel centres. The Modernist arts has its roots deep n the culture capitals of Europe. Culture capitals are those cities which appropriate certain functions to themselves and become centre of cultural exchanges places where tradition in given field is preserved, which are epitome of cultural activities and where the exchange of culture its interaction and the innovation is most likely.

Keywords: Civilisation, Modernist, Movement, Modernism, Impression, Concentration

Introduction

In fact literature has always a connection with the city. But Modernism essentially has its roots in few major cities of the time. For example Paris has been a centre of this movement for the whole span of the movement. Likewise the growth and intensity of the movement is reflected through various city centres. It is actually serving as an interface for cultural intellectual and social exchanges and Modernism has a relationship with this interface for both its genesis and spread around Europe and later in United States of America too.

Cities are seen in the work of art as a nasty place to live for all reasons and a critique of the same is presented through pastorals. Here the idea of a city which generates and culminates a form of art is different. When we talk about the cities where this movement flourished Berlin ,

Vienna Moscow, St. Petersburg around the turn of the century are the potent cities of the time in terms of fostering and unleashing the movement. The reach of the movement can be sensed in London around the early years immediately before the war . During the years of Zurich, New York Chicago reverberates with the movement and Paris is the central point which has always been a centre to this movement. We can sense the ripples of this movement in Paris around all times of the span of the movement in the close sense of that. As Modernism has special relation with the modern city and these provide a novel environment and epitome of culture . Epitome of culture simply means those cities which appropriate certain functions to themselves and become places where tradition in a given field is preserved. These were foci of intelligentsia at a

time when the intelligentsia was expanding and acquiring new shape. It was making a leap towards self – consciousness and was reaching the very pinnacle of activities related to these. In this respect the cities were places which were laden with immense possibilities to expand to experience to sense to acquire and to grow for an artist. These were the pools of materials for an artist as George Gissing has written “I am bound to be at London , because I must work hard at gathering some new material” The city was in every sense of term material, its specificity in every sense of term yielding up an artistic shape. In the same vein T. S. Eliot writes about the cities which really are the seats of possibilities to uphold and propel a wave of some kind to be an adulterous mixture of everything.

The cities which became crowded out for many reasons were a place to be exposed to new waves and norms. The shift in the manner of the society reflected through the city and the reaction time taken to reflect was almost zero . These shifts in other terms taking place in the cities were instantaneous. The material as Gissing points out available in the cities were myriad but the environment of the city was also in some way conducive for faceoff with own self. This was the psychic pressure exerted by the cities on the individuals. The movement of the cities were in different pace. The people of various occupation needed to look for their pace and this multiplicity of the city made it a place where one was expected to look for the ways of the city and even mingle with the pace that it offered. In this regard the cities were the culture of the time and it was fit for the artist to look for new material for their art and life.

London during the whole time of the movement generally and years before war

specifically became the centre for the movement . It became fraught with such activities and waves those were typically strange for the city of culture, tradition and wealth. The industrial centre and centre of wealth as London has been and the sheer signs of European culture that it carried with itself , was shifting to acquire a more chaotic and paradoxical environment. The city was over crowded and the people from all the walks of life were to find a place in this city of expansion. The multiplicity of the crowd and the influences of all these cultures made the city a vibrant place to live and experience the shift of time itself. In these context it can be said that cities were holding the possibility to permeate through all the spheres of lives and it was a perfect place to be in order to sense the realities of the time. The way city operated and the nook and corner of the city was bearing the change of the time. It was a perfect place to sense the culture in transition. The term ‘flaneur’ is in vogue which denotes the silent observer of the pace of a city. City dwelt itself as a material for observation and it over the time was so intricate that to sense the same required both qualitative outlook and time. In this respect all the cities were a place of cultural feat and the exploits of the time which science , technology and art had fetched all accumulated here.

In the history of Modernism London has somewhat ambivalent reputation. It the centre of Modernist activities of English language speaker . The years in the last decade of the 19th century and till the end of war it sustained the impetus of the movement and creates sustained ripples of the movement. The experimental sequences of the various activities of the time got reflected through the ripples created in London. Its fascination and its dullness regarding the true

churning centre of arts is captured in the poetry of the time.

The impression of London is captured in these words by H.G. Wells “The richest town in the world , the biggest port, the greatest manufacturing town , the imperial city- the centre of civilisation the heart of the world... It is wonderful place “

In this regard the lines by Ezra Pound are also worth quoting

“Beside this thoroughfare
The sale of half- hose has
Long since superseded the cultivation
Of Pierian roses.”

Here Pound talks about the cheap aesthetics of the time which in course are deflating the true value of art. In fact London has been criticised for the cheap aesthetics of the time and the dullness that city acquired because as city was the centre of so many activities it never housed true spirit in the accumulation of a real cafe a real coterie. Many poets through their poems have shown it to be an insular city given to insipid , indifferent middle class life.

Many a critics were of the opinion that the dullness of London was hostile to the new arts. For Eliot the same city London which is the city of Modernist art becomes the unreal city. To some critics London as the Imperial town sustained its reputation as the centre of culture to and both these images and impression of the city ran parallel with each other. London had now become the outright point for concentration for English national culture overtaking and pre-empting the role of the provincial large cities. It has acquired utter dominance in communication, commerce,

banking and of course, most forms of cultural activities. It was the pinpoint of everything . Everything came from London and it originated there be it books, journals, newspapers or magazines. It became a centre for all the activities of the area and soon converted into a compendium with the potential to expand even more and also with a fast speed in all dimensions of life.

Conclusion:

The fact remains that there was a great reshaping of experience and form at the turn of the century which is the crucial time span for the Modernist movement. A mood of experience was there in the sphere of art that we term as the mood of Modernism .The distinguishable English brand of the Modernism got its wings in the city of London where the city was catering to the need of material for the growth of the artist as Gissing has pointed out. There can be indeed no doubt that he obsession with the cities and new forms and styles are closely related. Modernism holds this true all the more because Modernism is an urban phenomena. In this sense Modernist Movement was a product of cosmopolitan London not England. In this metropolitanizing process, London increasingly comes to typify the great city of Modernity and in turn the Modernist Movement.

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