Q: Write a critical note on the element of modernity in modern poetry.

The modern is not merely that which is contemporary. It has its own set of assumptions.

The distinctiveness of modernity is more acutely felt in poetry. As far as time is concerned, modern poetry is usually said to begin in the last part of the nineteenth century, in the 1890s or thereabouts. The reasons for this dating are not difficult to find. Modernism in poetry can be dated back to the emergence of symbolism / Symbolist Movement in French Literature. Symbolism expresses dissatisfaction with the contemporary reality. It pre-supposes the existence of a superior reality which can be apprehended through art. Baudelaire was the first symbolist poet. But, since he expressed only a new element in the received tradition, he is considered to be a modern poet, and not a modernist one. According to Stephen Spender, modernist poetry is that which shows a change in technique and language along with the changes in theme. In this sense, Rimbaud is the first modern poet. Along with Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbiere are two other symbolist poets who are relevant to any discussion on the evolution on modern poetry.

In England as elsewhere, there was a movement away from the complacency and self-assuredness of Victorian and Gregorian poetry. The First World War had changed the existing value-systems and necessitated a new surge in language and themes. W.B. Yeats may be said to be the first modern English poet. But, the modern movement can be said to gain in momentum and intensity with the publication of T.S. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in 1920.

Even though the modern movement was in no way uniform, a few generalizations can be made. First, it is international in character, for it removed barriers of both time and geographical space. Ezra Pound looked to medieval romances, renaissance Latin, French and Chinese literature for inspiration. T.S. Eliot explored oriental classics in Sanskrit and brought in the Upanishads in his 'Wasteland'. W.B. Yeats explored folk realities and studied the Noh-theatre of Japan.

Secondly, the modern poets have a lively imaginative interest in the past for its own sake. Tradition is no more 'the inner handing on' of the striving and

changes of a hundred years. T.S. Eliot introduced a new idea of tradition. He holds that while the past influences the present, which is obvious, the present also influences the past. If a poet writes a work which can sufficiently modify the sensibility of his readers, they will learn to look at the classics of the past with new eyes.

The lyric is the form of the modern poetry. There is a tendency to move away from traditional narrative modes and the emphasis falls on the subjective. This entails introspection the lyric should be considered an interior meditation. This early modern poetry has direct links with Romantic Poetry. Modern poetry, therefore, can be defined as post-symbolist new modern poetry.

Modern poetry is the poetry of the city. The city with its pleasures and amenities as well as its confusion, disorder and disarray figures prominently in modern poetry.

Most modern poetry expresses the adumbrations of a crisis of man. Traditional modes of expression could no longer adequately convey the experiences of the modern sensibility. Language was, therefore, tortured into yielding new meanings.

While the first phase of the modern poetry in English under the leadership of Yeats, Eliot and Pound introduced a new era, the younger generations were shown to be disillusioned. The emergence of the psychological interpretation of Freud and the political experiments with Marxist philosophy gave rise to the second phase of the modern movement.

In the 1950s, there was still another phase of the modern English poetry. This new movement in poetry was represented by poets like Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin. Following this, the modern movement was found to be replaced by a set of new multifaceted trends called popularly the postmodern movement.