

# The Modern Age (1901-1945)

The Modern Age is marked with one of the most turbulent periods in history as evidenced by the fact that two World Wars were fought in this period. This era marks a clear departure from the complacency, compromise and stability of the Victorian Period.

## Characteristics of the Period

- The World Wars have shaken man's faith in religion and the established order. In want of new values, people were beset with anxiety and scepticism. The rat-race of modern industrial life added to this, which resulted in frustration, anxiety and cynicism. These tendencies recur in the literature of the period.
- The 'middle-class' concerns were upstaged as the glaring differences between the living conditions of poor and affluent class came to the fore. The low working class posed a significant challenge to the social conscience. The mid-Victorian writers, Dickens, Thackeray, Kingsley, Mrs Gaskell, were critical of injustices done to the proletarians. But they were not profoundly critical of the fundamental bases of human life and society as were Shaw, Galsworthy and H.G. Wells.
- New psychological researches influenced the literature of the twentieth century. The ordered emphasis on sex behaviour was changed entirely, and a rational view of sex relationship was evolved. G.B Shaw in *Candida* and *Man and Superman* exposed the errors in the conventional assessment of the relative role of sexes. The emphasis on psychology also gave rise to new

novels called 'Stream-of-consciousness' novels. D.H Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and many others were influenced by new researches in psychology and human biology.

- The development of radio, cinema and television had an enormous impact on literature and its production. Edward Albert remarks, "In so far a radio brought literature into the home in the form of broadcast stories, plays and literary discussions and opened up an entirely new field for authors... At the same time, it must be remembered that film techniques were the basis of a number of experiments in the novel."