

**T.S. Eliot's Poetry: Projection of Society****Gunjan**R.S.M. (P.G.) College, Dhampur  
District Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh**Abstract**

T.S. Eliot was one of the most distinguished poets who perceived literature in a very comprehensive and profound manner. Eliot who had an acute modern sensibility was more modern and more civilized than most of his contemporaries, but his true perception of modernity helped him to warn the society of the evils of unrestricted modernism and the irrational and subservient faith in the new ways of life which were thriving without any regard for the vital and the living past.

One of the greatest problems that confronted Eliot in his society was the increasing complexity of life and its growing alienation from traditional roots. Eliot had a deep desire to play some useful role in the society as a poet. He wrote in the "Use of Poetry" that "every poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social utility." Modern world is so much fragmented, even the creative individuals and specialists function without any sort of unity of purpose.

**Key Words:** Hypocrisy, Religious Faith, Rationalization, Emotion, Intellect and Sensibility

There is, Eliot noted, "an increasing isolation of elites from each other, so that the political, the philosophical, the artistic, the scientific, are separated to the great loss of each of them, not, merely through the lack of those contacts and mutual influences at a less conscious level, which alone perhaps, even more important than ideas." What Eliot deplored is the compulsive isolationism of the creative individuals which is one of the greatest maladies of modern civilization. A society that revolves around materialism has got nothing ennobling and inherently worthy. The activities of such society are trivial, ephemeral and uninspiring. Eliot who was deeply disturbed by the superficiality of his society asked very poignantly. Where is the soul of modern society? The most striking feature of this soulless society and they wander aimlessly

unable to connect anything noble within their individual existence. Eliot's young man, J. Alfred Prufrock, his old character, Gerontion, the woman character of his poem, "Portrait of a Lady" and other numerous protagonists lead only fragmented lives being unable to derive any vital strength from the society. Prufrock's soliloquy reveals his lonely state and also of others.

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of wind windows.

The poem ends by giving us a very clear notion of his abhorrence of human company:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The fate of Gerontion, an old man, is no different from Prufrock. He also leads a very lonely life with no larger contacts with the society. His empty, pointless existence is conveyed in the following lines:

Vacant  
Shuttles  
Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,  
An old man in a draughty house  
Under a windy knob,

In Eliot's "The Hollow Men", we hear the dry and empty voice of such a fabricated group which has got no inner strength and values:

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless.

The above group of hollow men, whose are filled with straw and who lean

together, seek nothing rather than inaction. They simply exist with artificial bindings and are trying to escape from life.

The effectiveness of family to hold together its members has also declined considerably in the modern age. Family is the first unit which must transmit the values of life and a spiritual conception of life. But these days, what is witnessed is broken families and disillusioned children. The girl who appears in the first section of *The Wasteland* is rootless and thrives on empty cosmopolitan values. In her reminiscences of the past, there is no mention about her family associations, the memories of her father and mother are conspicuously missing; she only remembers her cousin and her immoral relations with him. A life rooted in materialism and hedonism has relegated one's attachment to family, society and nation to, the back seat.

There is a great amount of hypocrisy in the modern society. Actually, the real strength of the modern soulless society is its egregious capacity to keep is the glorification of intellect and degradation of emotions. The emotional side is disregarded; but as long as there is a separation of emotion and intellect, there will be no true wisdom. We have educated men and women whose heads are filled with facts and information, but who can not feel deeply and whose emotional lives are at doldrums. In this context, Margaret Drabble's description of the lopsided growth of the famous British philosopher, John Stuart Mill is very illuminating.

Mill was a brilliant boy and appeared to thrive on his forced education, but also at the age of 21 he had what we would now call a nervous breakdown ... He realised that though he was brilliantly clever, and crammed full of information, he had no heart, no feelings, no pleasure in life and above all, no real understanding of others.

People in modern society may be rich, educated but what is the importance of being so rich and educated if people are unable to become good human being. Only good nature and character make a person wise but people in modern society are devoid of these essentials and are just hankering after money. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot deplores the present society's tendency to fabricate religious substitutes in order to sustain its weak selves:

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,  
 To report the behaviour of the sea monsters,  
 Describe the horoscope, haruspicate of scry,  
 Observe disease in signatures, evoke  
 Biography from the wrinkles of the palm  
 And tragedy from fingers; release omens  
 By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable  
 With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams  
 Or barbituric acids or dissect  
 The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors  
 To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual  
 Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press.

A lack of religious faith is the basic weakness of the society as described by Eliot. In such a society, there is no wonder, if sexual promiscuity thrives with impunity. A series of squalid sexual episodes weaken the city in *The Waste Land*. The banks of river Thames witnesses immoral sexual relationships. The submission and rope of modern day Thames daughters is one of them. Loveless sexual union, abortion, and abhorrence for children-the atmosphere is really vicious. In the second section of *The Waste Land*, "A Game of Chess" Eliot indicates the failure of sex-relationship in the modern world. Sex has become a purely physical kind of entertainment and has lost its moral and social purpose.

In the third section of *The Waste Land*, "The fire Sermon" we have seen a new drama of automatic lust; a lower middle class typist comes back home in the evening and sets her room to receive the young man carbuncular. He comes and guesses that she is bored and tried, he :

Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
 Which still are unreprieved, if undesired.  
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
 Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
 His vanity requires no response  
 And makes a welcome of indifference.

She has her own way of overcoming the ennui of life, though she does not derive any pleasure in sexual drama she has the departure of her lover does not matter to her; in her brain passes one half-formed thought:

Well know that's done : and I'm glad it's over.

However, it is only the rationalization of what she has actively done. She is fully aware of the injury she has inflicted upon her conscience with a 'heart burdened with a feeling of self condemnation, she :

Places about her room again, alone,

She smoothes her hair with automatic hand

She is trying to drive away the terror of loneliness by putting a record on the gramophone. This shows the debased attitude towards sexual relations between men and women. All this illustrates, not the fire of lust, but merely complete indifference towards chastity. Eliot finds no dignity in sex. In modern times it has become a mere copulation, no better than that of animals. The greatest malady of modern times as Eliot finds and we have made a note of it in the present article is western and within it a general sense of individualism. Can this be cured? Eliot's answer is categorically "Yes", provided it we understand the source of human alienation. In *The Wasteland* itself, he has shown that the wastelanders dread any companionship. Even young lovers fear coming together. There are of course no marriages in the poem and those who are already married wish to part their ways. That is how they find prostitution and other perverse forms of sexuality handy, for these forms do not entail any responsibility of the other.

This is a prevalent morality of the time, it of course began very early in the west in principium individuum, that is the principle of individualism.

Its seeds lie deeper down in human heart, in our desire to live, to put it more precisely in our will to live as Schopenhauer puts it. It is this will to have "more", to live more, and if possible everlastingly that becomes the root cause of human anxiety. This is what Eliot has accomplished throughout his poetry but as far as the remedy of modern society is concerned he strikes a very cautious note of optimism.

## References

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