

**Impact  
Factor  
3.025**

**ISSN 2349-638x**

**Refereed And Indexed Journal**

**AAYUSHI  
INTERNATIONAL  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH JOURNAL  
(AIIRJ)**

**UGC Approved Monthly Journal**

**VOL-IV      ISSUE-XI      Nov.      2017**

**Address**

- Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
- Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)
- (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 8999250451

**Email**

- aiirjpramod@gmail.com
- aayushijournal@gmail.com

**Website**

- [www.aiirjournal.com](http://www.aiirjournal.com)

**CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE**

## **Eliot and Classicism**

**Dr. Prakash. N. Meshram**

Principal

R.D. College, Mulchera

### **Abstract:-**

The question “What is a classic?” has always been asked since times immemorial, and the most varied answer have been given. T. S. Eliot emphasized the value of order, discipline, authority, tradition, organization and pattern for making a classical literature. According to T. S. Eliot Virgil also lived in a society which had maturity of manners and absence of provinciality. Eliot frequently emphasized the tradition which represents the wisdom and experience of the ages. In Tradition and Individual Talent, he studies European literature from Homer down to his own day as a single whole, and pleads that English literature must be viewed as a part of this literary tradition. To Eliot’s mind, classic art is concise and precise. While romantics suffer from diffusiveness and blurring of outlines. Eliot pointed out that classicism implies maturity, and maturity means a process of selection and elimination. A new kind of provincialism comes into existence. It is a provincialism not of space, but of time a provincialism which considers the past as dead and useless and which values the present at the cost of the past. It was in 1928, that Eliot made his famous declaration that he was “a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-catholic in religion.” Eliot aspired like the classics for formal perfection and he achieved it painstakingly. As he was a conscious artist, his poetry has a wonderful intellectual tone. Eliot feels a dire need for the acceptance of tradition, which is in reality a recognition of the real value of institutions, customs etc. the present paper attempts to explore T.S. Eliot’s Classicism throughout his literary work. It also highlights his rejection of romanticism and his poetic background as well as his classic ideal of perfection. It also deals with the anxiety in modern age and the sense of disillusionment.

**Keywords:-** Eliot, Classicism, Tradition, Romanticism, Intellectual, Negative Capability.

The question “What is a classic?” has always been asked since times immemorial, and the most varied answer have been given. The word classic has been used merely to mean a “Standard author.” It has been introduced for either Greek and Latin Literatures or the greatest writers of these languages. The term classic has also been used as an antithesis to the term romantic. As a result of classic-romantic controversy, the word classic sometimes implies highest praise and at other times the greatest abuse according to the party to which one belongs. It implies certain merits or certain faults. The classics appreciate classical art of its perfection of form; romantics criticize it for its absolute lack of passion. Classical literatures have certain qualities, but that does not mean that all great literatures should have all those qualities. “All those qualities may be found in Virgil but that does not mean that he is the greatest of all poets or that Latin Literature is greater than all other literatures. Or if no author or period in any literature is completely classical, as is the case with English, it does not mean that it is defective or inferior in quality. Literatures, like English, in which the classical qualities are scattered between different authors and periods, may be the richer for this very reason.”<sup>1</sup> The outstanding quality of a classic is maturity. A classic can only occur when a civilization is mature; when language and literature are mature and it must be the work of a mature mind. To define and explain the word mature is difficult. But

if a person is matured and educated he can easily recognize the quality of maturity in the writer or literature.

T. S. Eliot emphasized the value of order, discipline, authority, tradition, organization and pattern for making a classical literature. According to him the true foundation of poetry lies in the organized labour of intellect, rather than in the accidents of inspiration and intuition. Liberty is guide to truth rather than authority. The romantics believed in an accident of inspiration or intuitions. They believed in the poets "inner voice." Eliot's classicism arose out of his reaction against the exhausted romantic tradition. An inspiration is a matter of chance and accident and unrestrained liberty in the hands of lesser men is likely to degenerate into chaos. The evil consequences of such romantics were illustrated by contemporary English poetry which indulged in trivialities. Eliot emphasized, as a reaction against this state of affairs, that the classical school achieved elegance and a dignity absent from the popular verse of the romantic poets. He explained that the difference between the two schools is that between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and chaotic. So we come to know that Eliot appreciated the completeness and formed perfection of classical poetry and the classics could achieve this order and balance only because they followed some discipline, some authority outside themselves. Perfection is possible only when the ultimate guide for the artist is not his own self, but some objective authority. "Poetry is not merely inspiration, it is also organization. The maturity of the artist is seen in his ability to organize "disparate experiences" into a single whole. In mature art, there is "unification of sensibility," of the intellectual and the emotional, the creative and the critical. This can be achieved only by an exercise of the powers of the intellect. The poet, in order to achieve perfection, must be painstaking: "The larger part of the labor of an author is critical, the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing."<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot has recommended the ideal of Horace and Virgil that the poet should create in heat, but correct at leisure and lick his poems into shape. He followed this ideal while composing poetry of his own. He used to revise and re-revise till his work acquired the finish and polish of classical poetry. Hence, we come to know that he was a conscious, painstaking, deliberated artist in the noble tradition of classicism.

According to T. S. Eliot Virgil also lived in a society which had maturity of manners and absence of provinciality. Virgil's epic displays a refinement of manners resulting from a delicate sensibility and this refinement of manner is best seen in the private and public conduct of the sexed towards each other. The behavior of Virgil's characters never appears to be according to some purely local or tribal code of manners; it is in its time, both Roman and European. Virgil certainly, on the plane of manners, is not provincial. After Virgil there could be no great Latin poetry, for the subsequent poets lived under his shadows, and were measured by his standards. They could achieve nothing new or original. England is lucky, for in this country no one has exhausted all the possibilities of the language. Milton and Shakespeare exhausted possibilities only of particular areas. That is why there could be no poetic drama after Shakespeare, and no epic after Milton. Eliot says, "It is true that every supreme poet, classic or not tends to exhaust the ground he cultivates, so that it must, after yielding a diminishing crop, finally be left to allow for some generations."

Eliot frequently emphasized the tradition which represents the wisdom and experience of the ages. In Tradition and Individual Talent, he studies European literature from Homer down to his own day as a single whole, and pleads that English literature must be viewed as a part of this literary tradition. The poet must accept it as the outside authority, and only such acceptance can save English poetry from disorder and chaos. Eliot accepts this literary tradition in his own practice as his poetic background. Pope writes his Rape of the Lock within the frame-work of the classical epic and draws his symbols from classical mythology. In the same way, Eliot draws his symbols from the traditional literature of Europe. In The Waste Land, a blend of traditional European and Eastern Literature serves as a background to his contemporary problems. The legends, the fertility myths and vegetation ceremonies are used by him in

the same way as Pope introduces classical mythology. The Burial of the Dead is a blend of references to several traditions, showing similarity as well as difference, by viewing the present against the background of tradition. It is this background of tradition which provides “the objective co-relative” in Eliot’s poetry.

To Eliot’s mind, classic art is concise and precise. While romantics suffer from diffusiveness and blurring of outlines. Eliot’s images and symbols are clear-cut, concrete and precise. All his symbols are drawn from traditional sources, and he takes care not to disturb their significance. He does not change their meaning. In this way, he retains the essential suggestiveness of all symbols, while limiting suggestiveness to a clearly defined range. On the contrary, the romantics applied symbols as centre of unlimited expansion. The result was vagueness and indefiniteness. “Eliot’s use of imagery and symbol is classical: he retains the suggestiveness which differentiates poetry from prose, and yet assures that the suggestiveness is confined to his needs.”<sup>3</sup> Eliot achieves suggestiveness and expansion without loss of conciseness. He has the epigrammatic terseness and economy of classical poetry but at the same time, he achieves suggestiveness by drawing his symbols from the background of literary tradition.

Eliot pointed out that classicism implies maturity, and maturity means a process of selection and elimination. It means the development of some possibilities to the exclusion of others. In a perfect classic the whole genius of a people is revealed. A perfect classic must have comprehensiveness. The classic must express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling which represents the character of the people who speak that language. Nobody can find universal classic in any of the modern languages because even Goethe does not represent entirely the European tradition. Of all the great poets of Latin and Greek, it is Virgil who is the universal classic in the true sense of the word. Eliot remarked that wisdom is confused with knowledge, knowledge with information and efforts are made to solve problem of life through technology.

A new kind of provincialism comes into existence. It is a provincialism not of space, but of time a provincialism which considers the past as dead and useless and which values the present at the cost of the past. This provincialism leads to intolerance with its stress on the local and particular, rather than on the universal. No modern language can hope to produce a classic, in the sense in which Eliot called Virgil a classic, “Our classic, the classic of all Europe, is Virgil.” When Eliot rejects the idea of progress in relation to tradition, we sense the suppressed force of his reaction against the American progress myth. A classicist would never say “I can connect nothing with nothing.” He himself confesses that he wrote “The Waste Land to relieve his feelings. The Waste Land is his ‘Hamlet.’ “The essay Tradition and The Individual Talent is classic not only in English criticism but in English prose too, it is worth nothing that as in his poems, ‘where every word is at home,’ in prose too he displays an unrivaled flair for verbal precision. In the true symbolic tradition he prefers to work by way of implications and suggestions as to secure the lively co-operation of his readers. Some critics say its tone is dry and authoritative and that its rhetorical qualities shows Eliot’s distaste and for a different point of view.”

It was in 1928, that Eliot made his famous declaration that he was “a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-catholic in religion.” To him, authority, rather than liberty, is the guide to truth and so Eliot’s kinship is with Augustan Classicism. One of the important features of Augustan poetry was its satiric wit. After the decline of the classical school, that wit disappeared almost entirely from English poetry. T.S. Eliot is the first to use it again to anything like the same extent, combining in his use the manner of Augustan wit with the purpose of metaphysical wit. When Pope used wit, his purpose was merely to entertain, but Eliot’s purpose is other than that of provoking amusement. Satiric wit is a part of his ironic comment on modern life and its problems; it is not an end in itself but a handmaid of the serious purpose in his poetry. There should be wit in the poetry is the result of his classical predilections because wit needs brevity, phrasing and clarity of thought and expression, all features of classical poetry.

Eliot aspired like the classics for formal perfection and he achieved it painstakingly. As he was a conscious artist, his poetry has a wonderful intellectual tone. He possessed verbal precision and felicity. He frequently polished and repolished his verses and his revisions uncover his predilection for economy and precision in expression. Eliot constantly revised and his revision shows an intellectual rather than an instinctive, emotional approach to the construction of a poems form. Form and content are fused by shaping power of the intellect, till the meaning of the poet is conveyed precisely. While in his poetry up to The Waste Land, his symbols are largely derived from the European literary tradition, in his later Christian poetry, the source of his symbolism is the Christian tradition and Biblical mythology. Thus the staircase in Ash Wednesday symbolises the difficulties that have to be surmounted by one who aspires for the spiritual way of life. Similarly, Rose symbolizes Virgin Mary, the church and Divine grace. The three leopards stand for the world, the flesh and the Devil. However, the symbolic significance is ambiguous and so different interpretations have been given by different poets. The Lady may stand for the Virgin Mary, for a saint or for an idealized beautiful woman.

Eliot feels a dire need for the acceptance of tradition, which is in reality a recognition of the real value of institutions, customs etc. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Eliot advocated dictatorial ideologies like communism or fascism. He rather condemned them as an obstacles in the way of human development. He recognized that modern democratic institutions have degenerated, and so advanced a new concept of democracy, "a democracy limited by hereditary rights." Eliot is one of the great artist of the time who realized the seriousness of this inner or spiritual crisis, and whose works offer a view of life. They by now and then offer a philosophical or religious synthesis to the agonized soul of tortured humanity. "Eliot's view towards life is, first, frankly existentialist. Existentialism considers human life in relation to its unavoidable destiny, sickness, suffering, misfortune and death. Existentialists are aware of crisis, but they view the difficulties of today not as the result of some peculiar vicious economic or social environment but inherent in the very nature of human life."<sup>5</sup> This is what Eliot's view of the human predicament. It is for this reason that Eliot poetry abounds in the imagery of sickness, disease and death. Thus in the Love Song, we have well-known image of the evening being a patient etherized on the table.

"Let us go then, you and I

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table."<sup>6</sup>

This realization that tragedy is at the heart of life expresses itself as the sense of disillusionment in Eliot's poetry.

**Conclusion:-**

To sum up, it may be concluded that there is a close similarity between Eliot's poetry, and the Augustan poetry. Both of them accepted an existing poetic framework. Poetic framework is the rule of an objective authority. Both accepted to make conscious efforts to work within that framework. Satirical wit plays an important role in both. Its necessarily for that to cultivate precision of form and word. It requires an intellectual rather than an emotional approach while selecting words. Eliot's poetry has a greater scope as compared to Augustan classical authority pertaining to the system relating to his poetry. By its relationship with Eliot's poetry the traditional system acquires new significance. According to Eliot the poets must practice self control and universalize his emotions. He must achieve negative capability. i.e. to release from personal emotions. This is achieved by finding an objective co-relative for personal emotions. This effort of self-control of personal emotions imparts to Eliot's poetry an intellectual tone, one of the predominant qualities of classicism.

**References:-**

1. <https://www.google.co.in> from neoenglish.wordpress.com
2. Tilak, Raghukul. *The Waste Land Other Poems*: T. S. Eliot. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1990, p.33.
3. Tilak, Raghukul. *The Waste Land Other Poems*: T. S. Eliot. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1990, p.33-34.
4. <https://ardhendude.blogspot.in>
5. Tilak, Raghukul. *The Waste Land Other Poems*: T. S. Eliot. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1990, p.37.
6. The Muse's Bower: *An Anthology of Verse*, edited by Lucknoe Uni, Bombay : Orient Longian, 1989 p.156

