

Eliot's theory of objective correlative (B.A.Part 111 Eng Hons.Paper v)

Dr. Vishnulok Bihari Srivastava
Asso. Prof., Deptt. of English
R .M. College Sasaram, V. K. S. U. ,Ara

T.S. Eliot is the most influential critic of our time .Like other contemporary critics he did not write an independent book . Nor did he claim to have pioneered a school of criticism. His ideas are spread over here and there in his astray essays which were published in book form later on. He published his essay Tradition and Individual Talent in 1914 which is considered as the manifesto of modern criticism. Eliot has coined several catchwords in his essays which have given a new dimension to modern criticism. Prominent among them being 'objective correlative' 'Dissociation of sensibility' and 'emotional equivalent of thought'

Eliot has put forward the theory of 'objective correlative' in the context of Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet which he calls an artistic failure. Eliot gave a very pertinent argument that in this tragedy there is no compatibility between prince Hamlet's emotion and the stimulant or excitant which aroused his emotion.. Prince Hamlet had not seen even the face of his father. He had come to know about his father through his minster Horatio. The later suggested him to see the ghost of his father, king Hamlet on his tomb at the dead of night. When the ghost of prince Hamlet's father appeared before him he was stunned to know that his father did not die of snake-bite as the rumour was afloat. The ghost of his father revealed him the real story of his death which left him spellbound. He told price Hamlet that he had fallen victim to the conspiracy hatched by his uncle who conspired with his mother to eliminate his father to usurp the throne by pouring poison in his ear. The ghost also forced Hamlet to take revenge of his killing by giving same treatment to Claudius, the mastermind of the

gruesome act of killing .He also suggested Hamlet to be merciful on his mother leaving her to the mercy of god to pass verdict in this regard..

The question crops up to our mind that since the act of murder was not committed before the naked eyes of Prince Hamlet whether or not his decision to award punishment to Claudius carry any weight. Whether his decision will be given a legal sanction. Whether there is a compatibility between the advice of the ghost of his father and Hamlet getting infuriated at his advice. Should he repose faith in a person whom he had not seen before. A volley of questions crop up before our mind which raise a sense of doubt over the retaliatory measures undertaken by Hamlet .Had this act of murder been executed before his naked he would have been entitled to take revenge upon the act of killing .At this juncture there could have been a compatibility between the stimulus and excitant i.e. ,between the act of murder and the retaliatory action undertaken. There is a valid ground for the retaliatory action T.S .Eliot raises serious objection on this issue. He calls Hamlet an artistic failure on the ground that it is badly wanting in objective correlative. The compatibility between the stimulus and the excitant can not work in the event of Hamlet operating at the advice of the ghost of his father.

This lack of incompatibility between emotion and object led Eliot to think that despite all dramatic craftsmanship Hamlet is an artistic failure. He felt that in order to obtain artistic perfection it is necessary that there should be a compatibility between emotion and object Eliot wanted to apply his theory of objective correlative to other forms of literature also. M.L .Rosenthal has considered Eliot as of strictly modern age on account of this novel theory of Objective Correlative propounded by him. He said,

“It is T.S .Eliot’s method which makes him the most escapable as of the age”.

From the psychological point of view the theory of objective correlative seems quite sound and cogent. The psychologists of introspective school have proved that emotion is appropriated in proportion to the stimulus. What Eliot calls objective

correlative is precisely called 'vibhava' in Indian poetics. In literature emotion is expressed in a controlled manner. It is not left unbridled. The poet who fails to do so cannot be called a successful poet, In the words of Bhamah 'bad composition of poetry amounts to death'.