

T.S. Eliot as a critic (BA Part3 Eng Hons Paper 5th 2017-20)

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

T.S. Eliot is by far the most influential critic of our time. He was fed up with the existing critical scenario. In his essay *Function of Criticism* Eliot has compared modern criticism to a "Sunday park full of contending and contentious orators". He was the most condescending of all critics. He called modern critics idolatrous and unyielding who are not ready to accept their faults. He had written two essays on Milton. In his first essay on Milton he criticized him for corrupting English language which was outright rejected by E.M.W. Tillyard insisting that deterioration had set in prior to Milton which Eliot readily agreed and in his second essay on Milton showered bucketful of praise on him.

Actually Eliot was a classicist. He opposed tooth and nail the romantic approach that personal ideas must find an outlet through poetry. He was a die-hard critic of subjectivity in poetry and insisted that poetry should not be treated as a platform to express personal feelings and emotions and strongly advocated objectivity in poetry. In his essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919) which is considered as the manifesto of modern criticism, he developed the theory of impersonality and insisted that 'poetry is not a turning loose of emotion; it is an escape from emotion. It is not an expression of personality but it is an escape from personality'. He further added that 'the more perfect the artist is the more separate will be in him the man who suffers and the mind which creates'. Eliot has referred to scientific analogy of a catalyst to substantiate his views on impersonality. Eliot observes that at the time of creation the mind of

the poet works as a catalyst. By catalyst, he means the material the presence of which causes change in other chemicals but which itself remains unaffected. Eliot observes that if a gas chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide a platinum filament is placed, it gives birth to a new chemical named sulphuric acid. In this process the platinum filament remains unaffected.

Eliot rejected Shelley's poetry in which he found nothing but 'bad jingling'. There is a gradual march from concrete to abstract and from real to ideal in Shelley's poetry. He lacks a steady track of mind and is just like a butterfly moving from one flower to another. He also called him a poet of muddled thinking. His poetry is also vague and obscure. There is intellectual incoherence in his poetry.

Eliot has used several catchwords to bring home his ideas which include 'objective correlative' and 'dissociation of sensibilities'. Eliot put forward the theory of Objective Correlative in the context of Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet. In his essay on Hamlet he has insisted that Hamlet is an artistic failure. Eliot argues that there is no compatibility between prince Hamlet emotion and the stimulus or excitant which aroused the emotion. Eliot has used the term 'dissociation of sensibility' in his essay Metaphysical poets and insisted that there must be synthesis between mind and heart and emotion and intellect and praised the poetry of 17th century metaphysical poets led by John Donne in whose amorous poems he noticed a blend of rationality and sensuousness which was nowhere noticed in the poetry of the romantic poets.

Eliot has criticized the archetypal school of criticism led by Maud Bodkin, impressionistic school of criticism led by Middleton Murray and the new critics which he calls Lemon squeezer school of criticism.