



Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar

School of Humanities & Languages

Department of English

Topic - "T S ELIOT'S " THEORY OF IMPERSONALITY "

By

Dr. Bimlesh k Singh

HOD English.



Introduction

When T S Eliot began his literary career, he announced that he was a 'Royalist' in politics, an 'Anglo-Catholic' in religion and a 'Classicist' in literature. It's his Classicism which constitutes the core, the essence of his essay "TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT".

The very essay is divided into three Parts: The first part of the essay deals with Eliot's concept of Tradition; the second part mentions his well-known 'THEORY OF IMPERSONALITY'; and the third part is in the form of conclusion which dumps up the entire discussion. In the present topic under presentation, Eliot's most remarkable contribution to the theory and principle of poetry. e. 'IMPERSONALITY THEORY' has been discussed. Herein, an attempt has been made to critically evaluate Eliot's views on the process of poetic composition with apt illustrations.



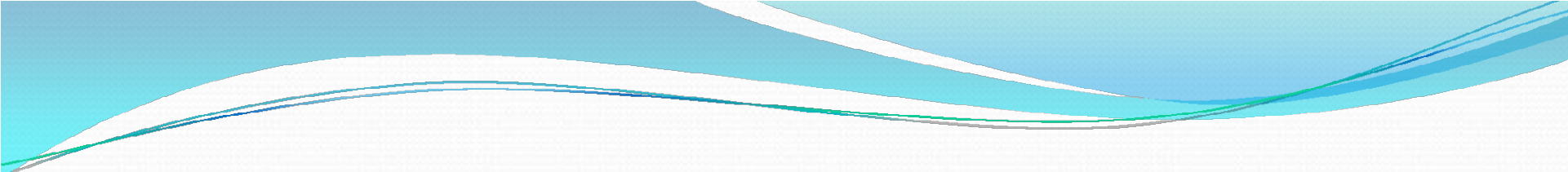
The second part of the essay 'TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT'

Focuses on Eliot's 'THEORY OF IMPERSONALITY'. Firstly, Eliot talks of the relationship between the poet and the past. Secondly, Eliot describes the relationship of the poem to the Author.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE POET TO THE PAST: T S ELIOT is of the view that a poet ceases to be a poet unless he is considered in relation to the past. There is an essential linkage between the poets writing in the present to the past.

Whatever a poet thinks to create in the present, it's because of the great traditions which work as a Presiding deity for him/her. T S Eliot asserts:


No poet or no artist has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. (Eliot,28).



What Eliot means to emphasize is that the past heritage works like eternal influences for guiding and shaping the creative spirit of the poet. The responses to the collective consciousness of the past really constitute the formative part of the poets' career.

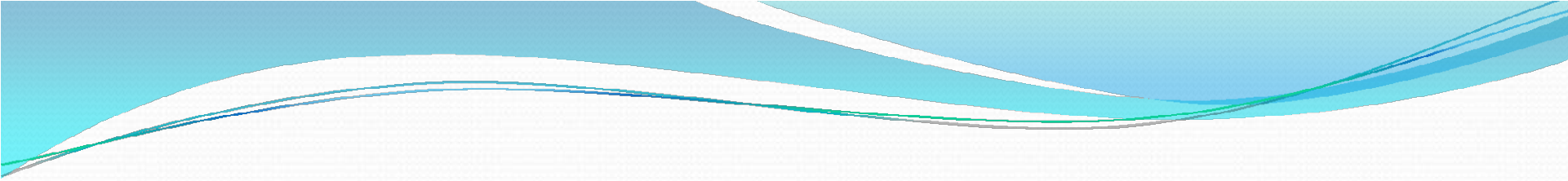
RELATIONSHIP OF THE POET TO ITS AUTHOR: T S ELIOT believes that a poem has complex and vital relation to its author. Strangely enough, the creation of a poem has nothing to do with the personal emotions and feelings of the poet. He reasons it because the art-emotion is different from the personal emotions of the poet. The immature poets may blindly copy other poets, but the mature poets and artists have unique power of modifying their personal emotions into the artistic emotion. He aptly writes:

The more mature the artist, the more completely different in him is the man who suffers and the mind which creates. (Eliot, 31)



Complexly enough, Eliot stresses the supreme role of the mind of the poet in the process of poetic creation. Referring to the Scientific analogy, Eliot discusses the vital role of the mind of a poet in writing poetry. He says that the combination of Oxygen and Sulphur Dioxide produces Sulphurous Acid. But then, for the smooth and successful conduct of this chemical reaction, the presence of the Filament of Platinum is a must. This is because the Filament of Platinum works as a catalyst in accelerating the rate of reaction at low temperature remaining itself unchanged and unaffected. Similarly in the process of poetic creation, the mind of the poet works as a catalyst thereby affecting the whole process of poetic creation remaining itself unaffected and unchanged. Eliot says that "the mind of the poet is the shred of Platinum "(Eliot,30).

Hence Eliot affirms that the emotions of art and literature are impersonal. It has its life in the poem, and not in the history of poets. So T S Eliot observes:



Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. (Eliot,30).

The IMPERSONALITY is the touchstone for a genuine poem and therefore Eliot was highly critical of the Romantics like Wordsworth who remained indulged in lyricism, subjectivity, idiosyncrasy, fancifulness, spontaneity and were cut off from Tradition and culture and refinement and correction. Its self-effacement and depersonalization which Eliot always valued most. So Eliot observes towards the end of the essay:

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion;
it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality. (Eliot,33).



Conclusion

Hence T S ELIOT'S ' IMPERSONAL THEORY ' is of immense critical as well as creative significance as it seminally guides and enlightens the poets and artists in the complex process of creating something really real and genuine. Though T S ELIOT is a Classicist, yet his novel views on the complex process of poetic / artistic creation seem to have unmistakably influenced even the Poststructuralists like Roland Barthes in his 'THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR' and Michael Foucault in his ' WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?'



WORKS CITED

Eliot, T S. The Sacred Wood. New York:
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Thank You