



# Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar

School of Humanities & Languages

## Department of English

Topic - "T S ELIOT'S 'CONCEPT OF TRADITION'"

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## INTRODUCTION:

T S ELIOT is the most representative of the Twentieth Century writers who represent the spirit of 'MODERNISM ' in literature. Not only as a poet but also as a critic, he is a pioneer, a predominant influence on the contemporary literature. Whatever critical theories and principles he postulated in his famous critical essays, he followed in his creative works. His essay 'TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT' is a representative critical piece. It's, undoubtedly, his unofficial manifesto of his critical credo.

The present essay comprises three parts: the first part deals with Eliot's concept of Tradition; the second part discusses Eliot's 'Theory of IMPERSONALITY ' and the third part forms the conclusion.



## TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF 'TRADITION ' AND ELIOT'S CONCEPT OF 'TRADITION':


Tradition has been most widely quoted term in literature and philosophy. But then Eliot deplored that the term 'Tradition' is mostly used as censure. It's generally regarded as the set of beliefs and rituals shared by a community/country from generation to generation. Eliot, however, discards any blind adherence to Tradition. He categorically calls upon all the poets and artists to abide by the concept of Tradition wisely and intelligently. Hence Eliot's concept of Tradition is radically different.

## T S ELIOT'S CONCEPT OF TRADITION:

Eliot's concept of Tradition is his most original contribution to criticism. He believes that for any creative engagement by the artist, the right concept of Tradition is essential. It's the genuine attitude towards Tradition which enables him/her to have collective consciousness of the past which always works as a guiding spirit thereby shaping his/her creative sensibility. He rightly says:

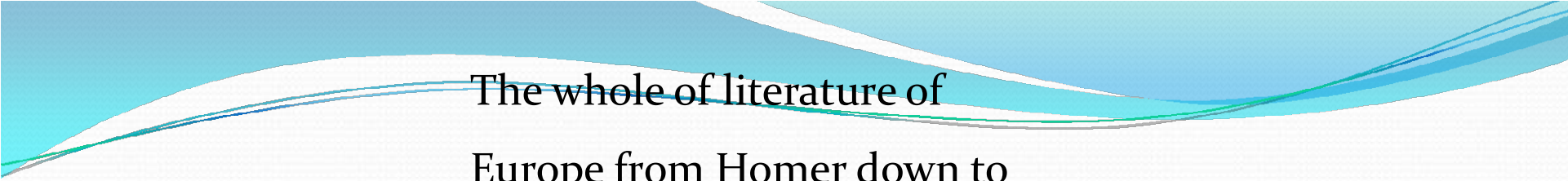
The poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop his consciousness throughout his career. ( Eliot, 30).





It's the intelligent sense to respond to the essential aspects of the past and Tradition which distinguish artists and poets. Appreciating a great genius like Shakespeare, Eliot asserts: "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British museum." (Eliot, 30).

Eliot says that when an artist engages in creativity, he realizes an aesthetic 'Ideal Order' as has been established by literary traditions before him/her. He must realize that 'Tradition' represents a 'simultaneous order' 'fusion of past and present' I e a sort of "historic timelessness " (Eliot, 27). It's from this that an artist develops a collective consciousness of the fact :



The whole of literature of  
Europe from Homer down to  
our times constitutes a historic  
timelessness. (Eliot, 27).

So every artist and poet who wishes to create something must have an unbroken realization of his eternal relationship with the past. The influences of the past on his creative Faculty is undeniable and inevitable. He must acknowledge:

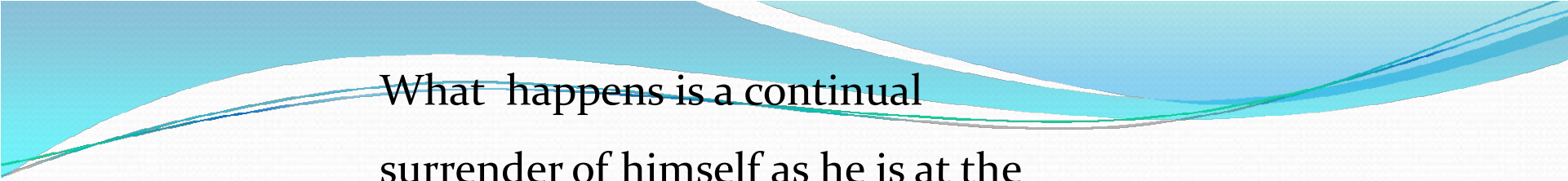
The most individual parts of  
his work may be those in which  
the dead poets, his ancestors  
assert their immortality most  
vigorously. (Eliot,28).

What Eliot intends to suggest is that the past predominates the creative artists eternally. The more the artists appreciate the real wisdom of the past, the more truly creative they prove. Eliot categorically puts:

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).

So Eliot calls upon every poet and artist to develop self-surrender for incorporating the eternal beauty of Tradition wisdom. He realizes that during the process of poetic creation, a writer has to depersonalize the self into something creative. He expresses it aptly:





What happens is a continual  
surrender of himself as he is at the  
moment to something which is  
more valuable. The progress of  
an artist is a continual self-sacrifice ,  
a continual extinction of personality. (Eliot, 30).

So Eliot primarily focuses on the supreme role of tradition in conditioning and constituting the creative genius of artists. The sense of Tradition is the touchstone for creativity .But then, Tradition cannot be inherited. It's obtained by critical labour, the intelligent efforts to select, eliminate and transform. Eliot vividly describes it 'Historical Sense' which enables the poets and artists to have the awareness of " not only the pastness of the past, but its presence "(Eliot, 28). Eliot wonderfully puts it:





The emotion of the art is impersonal.

And the poet cannot reach this

IMPERSONALITY without surrendering

himself wholly to the work to be done.....unless he lives in what is not

merely the present, but the present moment of the past , unless he is

conscious, not of what is dead, but

of what is already living. (Eliot, 33).

This is how artists/poets are able to.

Trans form the existing, by the alchemy of his "Historic Sense " into an

immortal.



## CONCLUSION: --

To sum it up, T S ELIOT'S CONCEPT OF TRADITION is dynamic, unconventional enlightened and visionary. There is something holistic about it. It's remarkable that Eliot himself practised whatever critical principles of 'Tradition' he formulated. Really, T S ELIOT'S CONCEPT OF TRADITION is of far-reaching implications for forthcoming generations of critics and writers. This all accounts for the universal appeal of his critique.



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Thank You !