

**T.S. ELIOT**  
**(1888 - 1968)**

This study material has been prepared for B.A. English Literature Paper-III Modern Literature (A) (Poetry) students of Vth semester for the session 2020-21 of Lucknow University

- An American Poet, Essayist, Playwright and Critic.
- Educated at Harvard, Paris and Oxford.
- Settled in England in 1915 and adopted British Citizenship in 1922.
- Till his death he was director of Publishing firm 'Faber & Faber'.
- Eliot has got 'Noble Prize' in 1948 and 'Order of Merit' in 1948.

**Work:**

- '**Prufrock**', 1917.
- '**Poems**', 1920.
- '**Waste Land**', 1922.
- '**Hollow Men**', 1925.
- '**Ash Wednesday**', 1930.
- '**Choruses from the Rock**', 1934.
- '**Four Quartets**', 1935-42.

**Literary Criticism:**

- '**Selected Essays**', 1932.
- '**On Poetry & Poets**', 1957.

**Influences:**

- Dante has a greatest influence on him (Writer of **Inferno & Divine Comedy**).
- St. John of the Cross.
- Jacobean dramatists
- Metaphysicals
- French Symbolists (Baudelaire & La Fourge)
- '**Bhagwad Gita**'

- Being a modern poet. Eliot is not everybody's cup of tea.
- He is acclaimed as modern poet
- According to one critic, 'Modernity consisting in incomprehensibility of matter and eccentricity of manner'.
- Eliot makes a tougher demands on his readers.
- He takes lots of quotations and allusions from a wide range of authors across the world- European & oriental.
- Eliot has a strong historical sense and believes in continuity of the past.
- This quality makes him a traditional poet in a unique sense.
- According to Eliot tradition is what we have handed down from the past- but a traditional writer develops tradition. He further believes that a traditional writer does not slavishly adopts either traditional outlook or traditional literary conventions.
- His unique idea of developing tradition makes him both too traditional and too novel.
- As far as themes of his poems are concerned it is the mosaic of many writers- his own contribution developing those themes seems to be negligible.
- Every poem of Eliot starts with epigraph or motto in Greek, Italian, French etc. interestingly whose connection with the theme of poem is not always clean.
- Another improvement thing about his poetry is that it is full of, quotations, allusions single lines, phrases, or merely words.
- He is obscure because of his style.

#### **We have in his poems:**

- General obliqueness of manner.
- Nothing is explicit or direct.
- Full of esoteric symbolism.
- Absence of logical sequence.
- Excessive use of paradox.
- He uses exaggerated phrasing.
- He is also known for extreme compression of grammatical links and punctuation marks.
- There are formidable difficulties in the path of readers understanding of his poetry.
- He uses variety of verse technique both in stanza form and in rhyme scheme.

- He distinctively uses 'free verse' based on loosed blank verse.
- His poetry is hardly distinguishable from prose.
- At the same time he is conscious and deliberate classicist.
- According to him poetry should be impersonal, he believes that private and personal experience has no poetic values and significance.
- Those experiences must be generalized, universalized and those experiences must be the experiences of the age.
- He is rarely lyrical, most of cast of his poems are dramatic.

#### **According to Eliot:**

- Poetry should be an expression of unified sensibility, integration of emotion and intellectual elements.
- His poetry seems to be enslaved to intellect and there is total exclusion of emotion in it.
- The poem, **The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock** is a dramatic monologue, which reflects the sordid and bored life of London during world war-I. The poem starts with an epigraph from **Inferno**, The journey from the world of sub-consciousness to consciences. The hero of the poem, Mr. Prufrock, a neurotic who exhibits abnormal sensibilities, talks to his own suppressed self. He addresses 'you', the split self of him when a lady makes advances to him, though amorous and passionate Mr. Prufrock shies away to respond positively. The theme of failure of communication between man and women has been successfully explored by Eliot. In establishing positive relationship between man and women, Prufrock is a best illustration of spiritual paralysis of Eliot's generation- '**Hallow Men**' who exhibits Eliot's **Waste Land**. Through the imagery of non-verbal communication and contrast of life of peasants vs. over refined society of Eliot's time, where the passion of protagonist of the poem has been conquered by his timidity while the lady to whom he wants to propose, boldly talks about Michael Angelo, but Prufrock searches some or the other excuses. Mr. Prufrock has been shown in the poem as a representative of modern and intellectually strong society but with split personality who doles between his sexual longing and its frustration.

#### **Work Consulted and Cited:**

- '**Eternal Rhythms**', 2012, Oxford University Press, India.
- '**The Infinite Riches**', 1999, Oxford University Press, India.
- '**A compendious History of English Literature**', 2001, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- Iyenger, KRS, '**Indian Writing in English**', 2017, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi