

T. S. Eliot's Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock : A Reinvigorate Observation

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Abstract:

"Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is one of evergreen poems ever composed by reverend T. S. Eliot, a shining star in the sky of English literature who lighted the fields of poetry, philosophy and criticism. He is one of the torch bearers of the modern age in English Literature. Prufrock has a split personality and is divided into two selves like Realistic self (brain/I) and Romantic self (heart/you). Prufrock through the various ways tries to go to his beloved and propose his love after being compelled by his romantic self but his realistic self every time took him from his imaginative and romantic world into realistic world; and throughout the poem Prufrock remains indecisive. Poem paints the scenery of urban life and metropolitan city and it's in form of an interior monologue of an urban man and his disillusionment and isolation.

Though the poem was first published in 1915 in Poetry: A Magazine of Verses and later in 1917 in Prufrock and Other Observations undoubtedly the poem is still influencing minds even in 21st century; my present article is not only an attempt to invigorate Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock but tracing its legitimacy in the current scenario.

Key Note:

Thomas Stern Eliot, theory of impersonality, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock",

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There is no doubt in the fact that T. S. Eliot made his name not only as a poet, critic, novelist, Philosopher but also one of the pioneers of modern poetry in the field of English Literature. Undoubtedly he was a rarely talented intellectual but one can not deny to the fact that after coming over the planet in 1888 in St Louis, Missouri (U.S.A.), he was brought up among the family which has a long history of religious and academic involvement, together with some concern for social good works.

“ ... symbols of Religion, the community and Education; and I think it is a very good beginning for any child, to be brought up to reverence such institutions and to be taught and selfish aims should be subordinated to the general good which they represent.”⁽¹⁾

This concept of “good work of some social concern” is bravely done by Eliot with the help of his successful attempt of composing poetry and writings. His works contain some best known poems like Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock of 20th century.

Two things go together for a poet like struggle with expression and matter to express, but they are divided only for the sake of analysis. T. S. Eliot is not the exception for this, but, like most of the poet he never expressed small private agonies but he expressed the things in a very objective manner. For a poet it is prerequisite that he must have some range, depth and representative technique. As for as T. S. Eliot is concern he has everything necessary to be a great poet. That is why he was awarded the prestigious noble prize in 1948. In the “Introduction to The Sacred Wood” he says that a work of art should be viewed as having a life of its own, unrelated to its creator:-

“We can only say that poem, in some sense, has its own life, that its part form something quite different from a body neatly ordered biographical data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet.”

Eliot gave lot of emphasis over the objective poetry and he propounded his impersonal theory of poetry:

“T. S. Eliot propounded his Impersonal Theory of poetry according to which every new poem was to be judged against the background of the whole of poetic tradition; he described poetry as the product not of personality, but of impersonal feelings chemically compounded within the poet's mind; he considered it the essence of critical appreciation to focus the attention objectively and exclusively on the particular work concerned.”⁽²⁾

His technique of presentation is excellent which supremely represents his era. His using of symbols, denying the usual logic of narrative, defining our modern disillusionment, absurdity and degradation in civilization etc. started a revolution in the field of literature, known as modernism and he proved himself a modern poet. At Harvard during his education he developed a distance and distaste for romantic enthusiasm and romantic temperament. Such kind of attitude related to the modern society and civilization against romanticism is beautifully presented in almost all his poem like *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow-Man* and *Prufrock* and other Observations, containing *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. These all poems and collections are undoubtedly now, become the landmark or milestone of modern English Poetry which are full of destructive elements, sordidness, the disillusionment, the confused or uncertain state of mind, false show, stupidity, ugliness, emptiness, existential absurdity and isolation of modern urban life.

“His early comic and satirical pictures of disillusionment caused by the war were soon supplanted by studies of the strange conflict between the beast and visionary in human nature.”⁽³⁾

Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, according to some critics has been inspired by ‘*Crapy Cornelia*’, a short story by Henry James or ‘*Less Complaints*’ by Laforgue. But as far as the representation of the poem is concerned, it is uniquely unique. T. S. Eliot’s theory of “*Objective Correlative*”, which he discussed in his essay on ‘*Hamlet and His Problems*’ in ‘*The Sacred Wood*’ is fully applicable to the poem ‘*Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*’ where he does not express the emotion directly but evokes them by appropriate images and objects. In other words we may say:-

“The images in ‘Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ are fine specimen of his doctrine of the ‘Objective Correlative’ – the poet himself stands at an ‘impersonal’ distance and lets the images and objects to reflect the emotions of the hero.”⁽⁴⁾

The poem *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, as its name suggests so, neither love song nor there is any glorification of the beauty of a beloved by a lover, but, in spite of this, poem is based upon the themes like paralyzed courage, shyness, confusion, inadequacy, loosed self-consciousness false show of pride & dissatisfaction of modern human beings. Even going through approximately 10 lines of the poem one may get the feeling of restlessness and dissatisfaction from Prufrock about his life or his disappointment with the society he lives in. Poet shows the condition of modern

human beings with their uncertainty of confidence.

The hero of the poem is unheroic toward love. He has a great hesitation in his mind about the proposal of his love affair. His thoughts are not clear even to him only. J. Alfred's stream of consciousness, which flows forward, backward and jump from one situation to another, are not logically but psychologically.

"Even besides the influence of Pound, this soliloquy of a middle aged lover, satiric and comic, dramatic and impersonal, reflected the influence of G. M. Hopkins, the French symbolist and the teaching of psychoanalysts."⁽⁵⁾

T. S. Eliot has taken many references in his poem, like, he has referred Dante, Donne, Marvell, Shakespeare and Bible, but, interestingly, he does not refer them to beautify the manner or glorify the acts of Prufrock or enhance the language and the language presentation but he refers them to show the prosaic atmosphere around Prufrock. T. S. Eliot starts his interior monologue with a quotation from Dante's Inferno. Dante while journeying through hell, encounters Guido da Montefeltro, who is wrapped in flame and suffering eternal torment for sins he committed on earth. He confesses his sins to Dante, a fellow prisoner of hell, in the illusion that he (Dante) never return to earth and besmirch Guido's reputation. Prufrock's 'song' is a similar type of confession of a soul in torment, in the terms of inaction rather than of action.

Prufrock's personality is divided into two selves i.e.; You, Romantic Self(heart) and I, Realistic Self(mind), and there is a state of contradiction between these two selves because of the timidity, cowardice of Prufrock. Such kind of strain between the inner and outer of the protagonist becomes clear in the opening lines of the poem-" Let us go then, You and I". Eliot very boldly presents the scenario of the modern city evenings where few hotels (cheap) finding the customers of very low moral and there is a specific kind of unconsciousness all around like a patient is etherized upon a table(operation table).

"... like a patient etherized upon a table;

Let us go through half deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one night cheap hotels...

Though Prufrock's personality is split into two selves but he tries his level best to unite them, but in spite of all, he does not have the courage to ask an 'overwhelming question' about his marriage proposal.

"The thought context of Prufrock as expressed in the poem indicated towards autobiography of the poet who longed for love but married at the age of 69 years."⁽⁶⁾

The images liken "...And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells; Streets that follow like a tedious argument" confirm the urban background supporting the lack of confirmation and hollowness related to social and spiritual of the protagonist. As F. R. Lewis rightly observes that through Prufrock T. S. Eliot expresses:-

"A modern sensibility, the way of feeling, the mode of experience of on fully alive in his own age."⁽⁷⁾

Throughout the poem T. S. Eliot again and again emphasizes upon the false show (emptiness) of modern urban society and he satirizes the tendency of modern women who pretend to be acquainted with the knowledge of day to day life as well as traditions, though they are not actually aware of many things- "in the room the women come and go; Talking of Michelangelo." Through the medium of the images like- "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening" poet conveys Prufrock's discontentment with his surroundings and his feeling of restlessness.

In the coming lines of the poem poet describes the laziness and wastage of time with "There will be time, There will be time" and "There will be time to murder and create". Poet also satirizes the urban life again where a man has many artificial faces or rather "a face to meet the faces that you meet"; the line also suggests the intense self-consciousness of Prufrock. With his images poet also presents how we don't have faith in ourselves and in our caliber. His images have some personal attachment also with the poet according to Peter Acroyd:-

"The images used on the poems ('Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and

'The Portrait of a Lady') are the images inspired by Eliot's stay in Boston..... Eliot himself confesses that 'we can not isolate' the character' with the environment'...".

This is generally said that there are three categories of men; first, men of low moral, who never start any work due to the fear of failure; secondly, men of medium moral, who proceed but leave the work unfinished and; thirdly, men with high moral, who not only proceed but find the target also after finishing the task assigned. According to T. S. Eliot now a days most of beings belong to the first category i.e.; of low moral. And he ironically describes this in his poem representing Prufrock, who only dreams and makes plans but never more a step in reality, as he ask himself again and again:-

“Do I dare? And, Do I dare?

Disturb the Universe”

Prufrock's utterance “Know then already.... Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons” gives an impression as if his life is over and he has no more to offer. Prufrock's personality, though, has lot of demerit but he is so conscious about his physical appearance. “They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’”, and he has a keen desire to win the love of the lady.

“The principal image of the sea with ‘mermaids singing each to each’ symbolically expressed the suppressed self of Prufrock and his longing for amorous fulfillment.”⁽⁸⁾

T. S. Eliot presents Prufrock in the resemblance of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the sense that both have the same tendency of thinking too much and try to delay the action. As Hamlet suffers from 'to be or not to be' Prufrock suffers 'And time yet for hundred indecisions; And for a hundred visions and revisions'. Not only this, but with the help of his reference Eliot again proves the inadequacy and in competitiveness of modern man. He shows Prufrock utters that he wants to be only attendant in spite of to be prince. Eliot shows that the condition of modern society where people want to be a servant whether of government or of any private sector. They don't have hope, faith and caliber to stand by themselves.

“No! I am not Prince Hamlet, not was

Meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advice the prince.....”

Prufrock compares himself with Lazarus, the name of biblical character who rises from the dead. But there will be no return for Prufrock from the spiritual grave that is his meaningless existence. ‘I am Lazarus, come from the dead, come back to tell you all, shall tell you all’.

On the account of the above description we can say that the present poem is a landmark in English Poetry and Ezra Pound’s enthusiastic endorsement to T. S. Eliot and ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ awakened the literary world to a previously unknown genius. The poem expresses the boredom, horror and dissatisfaction of contemporary world.

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