

CHAPTER - V

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Alienation is as old as human history. Man has always felt totally isolated from all around him. The growth of science, rationalism, industrialization, modern culture, modern ways of life, duality of objects are some of the reasons for man's alienation from God, Nature, Society, Family and Self. T.S. Eliot a versatile figure, alienated from his own lands, society and family has shown a deep interest for alienation in his literature. Almost all the major, and to some extent the minor, characters of his plays prefer or their circumstances demand, isolation. We have come to understand Eliot's view and vision of modern life, particularly, in relation to loneliness, isolation and alienation.

This thesis mainly focuses on three facets of alienation -- alienation from Society, from Family and from Self, as reflected in The Family Reunion , The Cocktail Party and The Confidential Clerk . This theme is seen as dominantly expressed in these three plays. Leonard Unger has rightly pointed out this in the following lines:

"The idea of isolation, of the impossibility of communication and understanding, has a direct bearing on Eliot's style, his mode of composition, and the structure of his poems, for the thematic problem is not only that of communication between one person and another but, finally, that of articulation itself"¹

The isolation of the individual is one of the themes of Eliot's plays, and closely related to it is the problem of articulation and mutual understanding. In The Cocktail Party, two ways of life are set in contrast, the way of the saint and the way of ordinary experience. It is admitted that "Both ways are necessary", and yet a choice must be made of one or the other keeping in mind that the world of the ordinary experience is not to be totally forgotten or forsaken. He further says:

"If in The Cocktail Party there is an affirmation of the ordinary way, this affirmation includes the attitude of being resigned to isolation. With The Confidential Clerk, however, the polarities of absolute isolation and absolute understanding are resolved by the acceptance of intermediate possibilities, of partial understanding."²

"Harry, the protagonist of The Family Reunion, in his complacent suffering and arrogant isolation, was a recognizable "Objective correlative" for the author"³

Harry, a psychic case, does not allow anybody to enter his world, either the world of the Eumenides or his real world. Amy, Agatha, Mary, Uncles and Aunts all fail to near him. The central characters imprison

themselves in their own separate worlds and the other characters do not know their worlds and refuse to know. Absence of love, generation gap, difficulty of communication, authoritative nature, puzzling (Hamletian) situation make them to alienate from each other or from their self. The title of the play is ironical as there is no family union or reunion (except Amy's birthday party) but only family disintegration. The couple, Edward and Lavinia, of The Cocktail Party is representative of modern society. 'Faith', 'love', 'loyalty'-- these words are replaced by high frequency words like 'hatred', 'distrust', 'deception', 'betray', are being worshiped. Eliot highlights the modern man's predicament his typical nature, his difficulties in communication, his trait of becoming serious for unserious things and making fun of serious ones. In the party, we see the cocktail of characters who come from different vocations -- lawyer, doctor, music, film making, etc. It is a formal assemble of guests and hosts, but one host is absent at the party and though the other is unable to get them well, the guests do not feel awkward. The party generally is a show of formalities, even that 'show' is absent in it. Edward trusts not his guests but a stranger, the Unidentified

Guest. Edward and Lavinia are jealous and suspicious of each other. They deceive each other. He worries about Lavinia's departure not because his love for her pure and loyal but because he is harassed by the queries of the others. He tries to hide Lavinia from the known guests but at the same time he tells the fact to the unknown. Modern couples do not understand each other and yet breed children whom they do not understand. Sex is a matter of pleasure for them. Eliot thinks that man should look upon sex as something sanctimonious and serious.

In The Confidential Clerk Eliot has handled another problem-- self identity. Colby, Lucasta, B. Kaghan are parentless. These young people do not have their own identities, own personalities. They do not have their exact origin. Why are they rootless ? Parents are the real cause of their rootlessness. The selfish purposes of modern parents, pre-marital sexual relations, disloyalty and deception in love are the causes of the separation between parents and children. Sir Claude, Elizabeth, Mrs. Guzzard, The Eggersons are childless. Mistaken identity, mislaid babies and foundling children create a problem of parenthood. Sir

Claude dreamt of potter and Colby of musician but both are frustrated as they are forced to do the unwanted jobs. Lucasta's mother was prostitute, a drunkard woman and so Lucasta calls herself a 'guttersnipe'. She could not just have self-respect in the circumstances in which she was brought up.

Thus the three facets of alienation are seen in these plays. We notice that alienation puts man in despair. At the same time man cannot live happily in isolation. According to Eliot modern man can live the life of a union of the body and of the soul only when he is guided by a high spiritual sense. In other words, his restoration of God will restore him to Nature, Society, Family and his own self.

REFERENCES

1. Leonard Unger, "T.S. Eliot's Magic Lantern" Moments and Pattern (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1956), p-19.
2. Ibid, p-30.
3. Ibid, p-38.