

## CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF TRADITION

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Definition of Tradition :

The term 'tradition' has been old and conventional which is used in different contexts and situations. Many definitions of this term have been given. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English - 'Tradition means handing down of opinions, beliefs, customs from generation to generation'.<sup>1</sup>

Tradition is hereditary, continued from one generation to another. It is transferring of the customs and conventions of the past into present. It is successive continuation of already existing customs, conventions, etc. According to The Penguin Modern English Dictionary - 'Tradition means oral transmission of beliefs, customs, story, law etc. from one generation to another'.<sup>2</sup>

It is the process of such transmission of body of principles and experiences handed down from past to present; a continuity of development, similarity and influence linking writers, artists, thinkers etc.

of one period to that of another. According to A Dictionary of Literary Terms - 'Tradition means handing over implicit and explicit beliefs concerning the function and practice of literature within every society and these constitute that society's literary tradition.'<sup>3</sup>

T.S.Eliot's influential essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent' (1919) sought to revify a sense of continuity of the European literary tradition. Specific trends and movements in literature are identified and called as tradition by Critics. F.R.Leavis, in his book, 'The Great Tradition' (1948) emphasised coherent development of the 19th century British novel. Tradition is reflected in existence of past in present time. But the concept of tradition gives a number of negative definitions.

'Tradition is not supposed to be a repetition nor an evolution as repetition furnishes no new parts and evolution involves the replacement of the old by the new.'<sup>4</sup>

According to T.S.Eliot, continuity and change are both basic to tradition as change assures the diversity of parts so continuity secures the identity of the whole.

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Nature of Tradition :

Tradition is not a purely literary term; it plays an important part in catholic theology and tradition . As Eliot passes from the literary to the extra-literary, he enlarges without substantially altering his sense of tradition. In this regard Austin Warren remarks -

'Tradition is not solely or primarily the maintenance of dogmatic beliefs; it involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.'<sup>5</sup>

Tradition is a way of feeling and acting. It is correlative to orthodoxy. It is a product of homogeneous population. It is largely unconscious.

Teachers of Eliot opened before his mind endless tradition of knowledge and experience which sharply cut across romantic inheritance of the previous century. Eliot was disappointed by the restricted appeal of English poetry, he turned to French poetry, specially French symbolists and Dante. His strong sense of continuity of European literature was the main reason behind his concept of tradition. A purely

literary concept was, in course of time, changed by social and political ideas, even by meditation on culture. According to T.S. Eliot, this sense of tradition held the writers of Europe together. Greece, Rome and even the literature of Israel created this tradition and led it to the development of a European mind. An abiding contact with the past which generates a common experience gives a firm grip on the present. The spiritual organic whole of Europe is inherent in the concept of tradition. Tradition grows and sustains the social and political fabric. In this regard Spengler quotes -

The creation of tradition means elimination of the incident. The nurturing of tradition takes place in blue-blood mobility. It, then, permeates the political and cultural life and upholds it<sup>16</sup>.

In his earlier essays T.S.Eliot took a purely literary view of tradition. Tradition has its roots deep in the classical culture of Western Europe. It does not connote its mere conventional sense of standing still, but it embraces a whole complex of attitudes and values. It is seen that the most of defenders of tradition are sentimentalists of the past

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and their approach is conservative. His vigorous defence of tradition and his elaborate definition of it are signs of the fact that he is no sentimentalist of the past. The tradition thus is not the same thing as the tradition of the conservatives. It is cultural. It seeks to integrate British Culture into the Western Culture.

Different Interpretations of Tradition:

T.S. Eliot stressed the need for tradition in society approaching towards the new wisdom to face new problems and situations in life is acquired from the past. His concept of tradition is his reaction against liberalism. The notion of tradition is one which plays a very fundamental part in his social thinking. In his earlier essays, T.S. Eliot has shown the importance of an understanding of tradition and of working within an inherited frame-work if a writer tries to produce anything of permanent value. According to Eliot, we can not appreciate the form of tradition without a sense of past and present together. It is very important to see Eliot's view of tradition that is subject to change. As generations change, tradition must be viewed from different view-points. We become conscious of tradition only when its manifestations are beginning to fall into disuse. Bantock G.H.. -

in this regard remarks -

'Tradition can not mean standing still, tradition truly defined is not something inert but includes a dynamic element which enables these unconscious elements to work meaningfully in order to produce coherence in an age or a personality.'<sup>7</sup>

The importance of tradition is to aim to stimulate the life and the acceptance of tradition must be supported by the conscious critical awareness of orthodoxy. Tradition must be brought up under the supervision of orthodoxy. If tradition is of the blood, orthodoxy is of the brain. Tradition may sustain good and bad elements which are checked by orthodoxy. In this regard, Bantock G.H. remarks -

'History - tradition is something positive in the life of the present, not simply something to be discarded as irrelevant and restrictive.'<sup>8</sup>

Tradition, for Eliot, can not be inherited and if one wants it one must obtain it by great labour. It involves a historical sense which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be poet beyond his twentyfifth year. Thus what is important in Eliot's definition of tradition is to attempt to

see one's literature within larger patterns of an international literature.

Tradition and Classicism :

Classics is at the top of T.S.Eliot's critical theory. A classic, according to him, expresses the common vision in a common style which is the synthesis of the whole range of feelings of a people. A classic is the expression of the ethos of a culture rather than the intensity of a private vision. Common culture and ordered society are essential conditions for the production of classics. Also classics depend upon the vitality of religion. As the classic has universal approach, it has to be true not only to anyone but to that of the whole world. It is on this basis that a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Kalidas and a host of other names attain the attributes of universality. In this regard, Krishan Lal Sharma remarks-

'The whole of European literature is one whole and its blood stream is Greco-Roman.'<sup>9</sup>

He was basically opposed to the romantic theory which does not attach any significance to tradition. Eliot, the high-priest of tradition, stresses the importance for contemporary writers, also. He



emphasises the presentness of the past order and shows that the needs of the present age can be expressed in the perspective of the past tradition. In addition to this, the present has a relation to the past because the traditional order is modified by the production of a truly great work of literature in the present.

But 'Classicism' says, Eliot, is not an alternative to 'Romanticism'. It is a goal towards which all good literature strives so far as it is good according to the possibilities of its place and time. The proper end of the Romantic, Eliot says, is to achieve the classic. This shows that the views of tradition of Eliot are originated from his devotion and respect towards classicism.

#### Tradition and Other Theories :

Alongwith the development of the theory of tradition Eliot developed other theories of objective correlative, impersonal art and dissociation of sensibilities which have been influenced by his sense of classicism or tradition. Eliot was opposed to the expression of personality in art but he wants artist to escape from personality. The poet may be viewed as a composite whole exhibiting a pattern of interests

and attitudes which is his personality. On the other hand, he may be viewed as a component part participating in the activities of such larger whole as tradition and culture. In this regard, Lu-Fei-Pai remarks -

\*The presence of a unified personality behind a poet's works suggests the basis for Eliot's distinction of the 'major' poet from the 'minor'.<sup>10</sup>

Eliot's conception of tradition gives a way for originality. The historical sense is an instrument of self-discovery which is the instrument of the discovery of the whole. The historical sense brings maturity to the mind of the artist. Thus other theories of Eliot have a relation with his idea of tradition.

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