CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In considering the function of criticism Eliot does not overlook the importance of the relationship between life and literature. He looks at both life and literature from a definite standpoint. For Eliot, criticism is not merely concerned with establishing literary and critical standards but also with indicating how a literary work can attain the height or level at which it can be called great. This "greatness" of literature has a great deal to do with a view of life, its aims and ideals and objectives. Therefore, in the light of the higher values of life, criticism has an important function to perform. In his view, the purpose of criticism is "the elucidation of works of art and correction of taste". The purpose hinted at is ultimately the social purpose and implies the social impact of the works of literature.

Eliot has been clearly concerned with seeing literature in relationship with the social and religious concerns of man. His practical criticism is puristic, analytic, comparative, generic and formalistic, not psycho-analytical, nor psychological criticism. He stresses the textual theoretical standpoint. This implies that Eliot the critic has a definite system or guideline in his approach. He aims at a critical theory which is comprehensive, synthetic and one which is not devoted merely to underlining or explaining the literary aspect of a literary work. His emphasis on analysis and comparison, insight, intensity, impersonality, objectivity and generalizations based upon the text constitute the essential principles of criticism in his theoretical framework.
It is true that in course of his practice of criticism Eliot makes observations which sometimes contrast with his own theoretical standpoint. But generally as a critic his theoretical approach is based on giving due weight to merit of the work, intelligence and other human factors. These factors help in elucidation of a literary text keeping it close to social, human or moral realities.

Eliot's stress on the social context of literature is evident from his emphasis on the need for revival of poetic drama. According to him, poetic drama should be based upon the speech rhythms of people in contemporary situation. Its purpose is not only to depict the superficial, the ephemeral, the temporal and the external, but the deeper level, concealed in the musical pattern beneath the surface. His criticism shows a preoccupation with the possibility of verse drama. The central problems of verse drama are in his view connected with versification and diction. He emphasises drama as performance on stage rather than as literature. And yet he recognises that the unique quality of drama is its deep relation to human needs. It represents a relation of human needs and their satisfaction which the age provides. One of such permanent needs is the desire for the supernatural expressed by religion.

* Eliot underlines the close relationship between poetry and drama and promotes the view that poetry and drama are essentially inseparable and inextricable. Therefore his critical theoretical statements on poetry and drama are essentially interlinked through their common concern with exploring or presenting a vision of the supernatural. Eliot's practice of dramatic criticism is directly the result of his own practice as a poetic dramatist and his dramatic sensibility
reflected in his poems. What is of great significance in Eliot's dramatic criticism is that drama should not take mostly from ordinary reality of everyday life. Instead, it should bring us closer to it. Accordingly, dramatic poetry should help bring drama come to terms with the ordinary everyday world.

Whereas 'the aim of poetic drama is to combine the utmost fringe of subjectivity in human consciousness with the greatest range of objectivity the function of verse drama is to look deeply into, and communicate, the incomprehensible. Besides, good poetic drama is intended to contain some deep meaning or vision which will give emotional depth to a play. In poetic drama the aim of a dramatist is the presentation of the doubleness of action and the inner pattern.

In his criticism of drama he considers the whole rather than the part and takes into consideration the pattern that constantly emerges from the whole sequence of the plays of a playwright. He also introduces the idea of unity, the Unity of Sentiment, in the theoretical formulations of principles for analysing a play. This unity is based on the unification of emotions.

Another important theoretical principle stressed by Eliot is the 'objective correlative'. The principle of "objective correlative" holds good not only for drama but also for other forms of literature. Thus his analysis of Hamlet has been done on the basis of a well-conceived theoretical principle.

The constant preoccupation with the idea of the "objective correlative" is, however, a part of Eliot's essential concern with his doctrine of impersonality and his larger concern with effecting a fusion of poetry and drama in
dramatic poetry and poetic drama. It is also a part of his concern with the problem of widening the critical awareness of the need for restoring poetic sensibility to prose drama.

In his discussion of criticism of poetry Eliot postulates that the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones, and, by working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.

He insists on the need for values and qualities in poetry. He also lays stress on wit, intelligence and common sense in poetry which comes in sharp reaction to the nineteenth-century values and taste for sheer aestheticism. He does not overlook the fact that the essential function of poetry is not intellectual but emotional.

Thus, Eliot has a theory which is definite, articulate and coherent. He makes a determined shift from the traditionally valued content by directing attention to the medium and the artistic process in his theory and practice of poetic criticism.

While discussing Eliot's criticism of poetry we come across creative, historical or moralistic criticism. He holds that the only genuine criticism is that of the poet-critic who criticises poetry in order to create poetry. One may think we cannot apply this view to his novel criticism which has its own merit just because he did not write any novel. But it is possible to generalise here that Eliot prefers criticism which comes from a creative writer who has gone through the travails and the experience of creative writing. This reminds one of Ben
Jonson's view with which Eliot's seems in agreement when the former says that "to judge of poets is only the faculty of poets". Eliot's idea of poetry as "escape from emotion" and "escape from personality" appear to be closely related to his notion of the historical or the traditional sense.

While discussing the notion of impersonality the principle of depersonalization in art serves as an important aspect. Also another aspect of Eliot's critical theory is the "Dissociation of Sensibility". It stands for the separation of feeling from thinking, and intellect from passion.

Eliot concentrates on poetic criticism from a purely literary angle. He takes neither the aesthetic nor the historical critical view but a purely literary critical view of poetic creation, poetic activity and poetic vision. He discusses a poem purely on the basis of classical ideals or principles such as impersonality, refinement, economy, concentration, condensation, definite emotion, literary allusions, rhythm, etc. At no point does one feel that Eliot tries to emphasise the need for directing the attention of the critic to the poet's moods or biography, culture or society, religion or philosophy. Clearly, he takes a practical theoretical stand that the New Critics take - that of concentrating on the poem itself. While his theoretical position finds illustrations in his own poetical composition and vice versa, he takes a similar theoretical stand on novel and drama. But we do need to emphasise that on account of his stress on the moral view of life and letters he is a New Critic with a difference who does not isolate literature and art from society but brings it close to culture which includes politics and religion. That is why it is possible to regard Eliot not
merely as a literary critic in isolation but he is also simultaneously a critic who has a comprehensive theory of criticism. He is a critic whose criticism has a definite theoretical foundation which emerges from his critical views expressed before or after his critical practice.

Likewise in discussing Eliot's novel criticism it is worth noting that there is a definite theory of novel presented in his criticism which is evident from the fact that he reviewed great novelists in almost all the major languages of the world. To him, the contemporary novel provides an illustration of the mythical method instead of the conventional narrative method. He uses the mythical method in his own poetry which he considers useful for the artist of the twentieth century.

Eliot is of the view that the pattern in a novel implies the textual and structural design of it. It may be said that the characters, dialogue, story, action or rhythm constitute and also contribute to the pattern. The pattern in a novel also implies aesthetic beauty, unity of impression, artistic perfection, consistency and completeness and roundness of the story.

Like any great piece of art, be it a drama or a poem, a great novel, in his view, does not present to us 'ideas'; rather it communicates a vision of life and a view of the world. According to Eliot 'ideas' in great art justify themselves only when they come to the reader through their sensuous apprehension by the artist.
Eliot analyzes novels in the light of the experiences and perceptions which he gained in the composition of his own poetry. He also looks at the novel primarily in psychological terms which is in fact responding to something as daring and experimental as his own poetry.

Theoretically, Eliot's stand on the nature of poetry or drama is similar to that on the novel. Just as he speaks of the doubleness in action of poetic drama, he also speaks of the doubleness in action of prose.

The possible presence of both the dramatic and the melodramatic in fiction is also considered by him. Besides, he postulates the use of the mythical method in poetry as well as in novel which is accepted as a permanent possible artistic device for treatment of a literary subject-matter. Moreover, he commends the artistic device of blending myth and realism as applicable in poetry, drama and fiction. He visualises the possibility of applying his critical theory of impersonality in the field of novel too.

As a true classicist Eliot prefers the maintenance of artistic purity in artistic expression and does not encourage intermingling of genres.

Eliot views Lawrence's works from a definite angle - the angle of an artist backed by a moral vision of the world. He finds Lawrence's art deficient because it is not backed by a moral vision of life. Clearly, when he examines Lawrence's novels he applies to the novel the concept of art as the embodiment of an idea from his poetic and dramatic theory. In his late novels Lawrence had been led away by doctrinal considerations. He used the novel as a vehicle for promoting ideas.
It can be said that Eliot's theoretical stand on the novel derives basically from the same premises that govern his approach to drama. In his approach to the novel he displays a considerable range of sympathy without compromising his fundamental beliefs. In his criticism of the novel we get an interesting and sensitive writer's response to novelists of varying technical and moral achievements. Eliot's criticism of the novel is free from self-centredness which corrupts independent judgement and often becomes eccentric. He always qualifies his judgements and is not above modifying some of them on subsequent re-examination. These virtues concerning Eliot's fictional criticism have been displayed, first, in his allegiance to the traditional mimetic conception of the novel, and then, in his attempts to go beyond mimesis and explore the possibilities of the genre of fiction in new contexts, and, lastly, in his synthesis of the two through search for a unifying myth as a technical and moral factor in the modern novel.

In The Sacred Wood Eliot defines the true critic as one who is aware of the problems of art and uses his knowledge of the past to shed light on the present. It is desirable to see Eliot's criticism of fiction in the light of this overall theoretical purpose. Eliot seeks the synthesis of the old and the new in moral as well as stylistic terms by accommodaiting new experiments in writings on drama, poetry, fiction, politics and religion within the framework of English tradition in life and letters. He also tries to bring about this synthesis by maintaining a balance between the traditional expectations of the novel and the unconventional experiments of his contemporaries. In his statements and sometimes brilliant comments he exhibits the evidence of an alert intelligence.
Thus it may well be said that Eliot's criticism of fiction, like his criticism of poetry, drama, etc., relates his own practice to that of other important critics of fiction.

It may be said that Eliot's reputation as a social critic has been worse than what is perhaps on record. The number of those who have been shocked or repelled by his irreverent attitude towards ideals such as liberalism and democracy is greater than the number of those who set themselves to discover what he did uphold. Generally, his views on social matters were regarded as thoroughly reactionary, or highly eccentric, or both. Some readers represent him as politically degage, a Symbolist claiming reality for a private dream world. Eliot says quite explicitly that it is not his concern either to bring about a revival of religious faith or to indicate the means for bringing a Christian society into existence. He insists that his primary interest was in effecting a change in our social attitudes which could bring about anything worthy to be called a Christian society. It may thus be clear that he does not want to advocate any particular political form but whatever state is suitable to a Christian society or whatever State a particular Christian society develops for itself.

Eliot believes that religion is a vital element in a culture. He is convinced that an essential matter to be attended to in the consideration of religion is the question of truth and not the question of utility or aesthetic quality. There is, all the same, a problem which is to be solved. There is an ambiguity in what Eliot has from time to time written about religion and culture. The critical discussion of religion has a direct bearing on what becomes for him ultimately a central political problem - the relation of Church and State.
There are no doubt gaps or inconsistencies in Eliot's systematisation of his views and principles. But these gaps and ambiguities in his arguments on the questions of religion, culture and politics may also from one standpoint be virtues rather than shortcomings. These shortcomings make his arguments more natural, and more thought-provoking. There is no force in attempts at systematization. For instance, in dealing with certain 'mixed' questions where the problems of religion, culture and politics run together, Eliot's method of examining particular questions in the light of general principles which are not well defined is certainly a more convincing method of arguing a case.

Eliot's social, political and religious views are inevitably coloured by his moralistic leanings. As Roger Kojeccky notes in his first essay for the Bookman in November 1929, Eliot elaborated a statement on the moral turn which his own criticism, and that of others in America and Britain, was taking. But Iris Murdoch diverts the attention to a consideration of the reasons for moral appeal in Eliot's writing and asserts that to appreciate the nature of this appeal it is necessary to see the basis of his opposition to 'liberalism'. According to Murdoch, Eliot seeks liberalism as the end product of a line of thought which is to be met with earlier in Stoicism, in the Renaissance, in Puritanism, in the Romantic movement and in nineteenth-century Humanism. This line of thought exalts human personality and denies any authority external to the individual.

Eliot's social criticism always evoked disagreement. It is worth noting here that sometimes the disagreement emerged even from the friendly quarters which he expected to be fairly sympathetic to his outlook. An important seminal element in
Eliot's critical analyses in the field of political theory is also present in an essay in the *Criterion* of December, 1928. The subject of the essay was Fascism. In it he shows himself to be well aware of the increasing contemporary interest in Fascism.

Eliot continues to adhere to the doctrine of tradition even in religious and political thinking in line with his 1928 essay which was more sympathetic to the Action Francaise, because of its royalism, its attachment to hereditary class, and its emphasis on regional loyalties and culture. He takes note of Charles Maurras's 'grotesque' nationalism, and criticizes the way he and his friends seemed to consider politics as a science independent of morals.

It may however be noted that in Eliot's criticism after about 1921 the discussion of the creative process no longer predominates as it did before that time. He is preoccupied with discussing the actual subjects of poetry. And the eligible subjects are found to cover a wide range of possibilities and on the deeper interaction of poetry, philosophy, religion, politics. But now Eliot demonstrates in his essay on Dante that not only damnation but purgation and beatitude as well could be regarded as fit subjects for a poet to deal with.

As a result of the general subordination of purely aesthetic interests to metaphysical, political and cultural interests which took place in his criticism after 1921, Eliot attempts more systematically to relate his aesthetic opinions to his main beliefs and attitudes in other fields. He soon comes to treat religion coolly and in a less fanatical spirit than the first converts to religion generally profess.
Eliot insists on the close connection between religion and literature in the essay of that name. He says that most modern literature, especially fiction, has become quite secularised. We completely separate our religion from our literary judgements. Yet, he declares, "the separation is not; and never can be complete." He means that though it may be complete on the conscious plane it remains incomplete on the unconscious plane - assuming of course that there is religion. For there is a common ground between religion and fiction, that of behaviour, or ethics. Eliot examines the moral usefulness or harmfulness of literature and says that "the fiction that we read affects our behaviour towards our fellow men, affects our patterns of ourselves."

Eliot's interests in fact are not purely theoretical; he knew that his life was bound up with the life of his culture, with the life of his literature. He knew that everybody’s life was bound up in that way. He, therefore, visualises the social, political and theological functions of poetry or literature when he concedes that poetry is capable of unifying the world either for good or for ill.

Eliot speaks as a Christian in his statements on religion and aesthetics, but as one for whom there is no need to emphasise his own faith. This partly accounts for his failure to completely clarify the relationship between art and religious belief. Nobody can fail to recognise the practical connection between the two. Besides, too many people welcome Eliot’s art as a contribution to Christian propaganda. But then looking more dispassionately at his literary, social or political criticism and taking into account the sharpness and
sensitivity of his intellect in his critical analyses of literary, social and political or theological tracts or institutions, it can be argued that Eliot is more analytic than even the New Critics. He is a critic who is a class by himself. It would be worthwhile to pursue in detail the critical insights that have attained the level of universality in consonance with his doctrine of impersonality.