CHAPTER VI
The Hollow Men, another powerful poem, deals with the hollowness of the inhabitants of the waste land. The epigraph -- Mistah Kurtz -- he dead -- is from Conrad's The Heart of the Darkness. As his epitaph, did not fit in with the hope of regeneration, "What the Thunder said" of The Waste Land came out as a separate poem. Mistah Kurz who is really dead went to death with direct eyes embracing, condemning and loathing all the universe. He did not die a passive death after deadened sensibility.

Another source of the poem is 'the Gun Powder Plot' of the time of James I, after the death of Elizabeth. Robert Catsby, the leader of the catholic extremists, planned to kill King James and his ministry at the opening of the State Parliament. But the plan was foiled by Frances Tresham and arrested by Fawkes who was guarding two tonnes of gun powder.

Another source of the poem can be Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Brutus and Cassias along with their party plot to kill Julius Caesar to establish the republican form of Government in Rome. But as Brutus is blinded by public
good and personal honour, he does not know that it is a foul play. So he is the hollowest of all.

The fourth source of the poem is Dante's *Divine Comedy* where Dante himself is condemned to Hell. The condition of the Hollow Men is like that of the damned souls in *Inferno*. They are the people of the death's dream kingdom.

The poem is fraught with powerful images that suggest that people in the modern world are hollow and they lead meaningless lives. They are like Robert Catesby and Brutus who were failures. They do not have any faith in religion or rituals. They are the stuffed people with straw. In the words of Elizabeth Drew:

> The full horror of the situation of spiritual stagnation is experienced without the actively dramatised revulsion towards the personal change. The poet sees himself inescapably identified with his environment, and any power of choice or movement towards action of any sort seems utterly paralyzed.

The poem begins with the theme of bare existence

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men.
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar (1-10)

Here, the image draws our attention to the aimlessness in the life led by the Hollow Men. One is naturally reminded of the words of Brutus who says:

But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle
But when they should endure the bloody spur,
They fall their crests, and like deceitful Jades
Sink in the trail.  

Modern men do not have any substance, direction or purpose in life. Therefore they do not have any identity. The protagonist in the poem feels dejected and disappointed in life. Humanism is lost completely in the realm of mankind. Man cannot face life successfully. Modern civilization and modern man are responsible for the loss of identity. Man has exposed himself to the valves of modern civilization which is hostile to spiritual life. Moreover the complex, the mechanical and the materialistic civilization caused the loss of identity.

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The modern man is like old Guy Fawkes. The effigy of Guy Fawkes is made of old clothes stuffed with paper, straw and rags and it is burnt. Like Guy Fawkes, modern man is frustrated. So the image of the "Headpiece filled with straw" suggests the theme of the loss of identity. The modern man is sterile, empty and valueless. The images such as 'dry grass' and 'broken glass' suggest the idea of his death struck spirit and broken personality. The image of "dry cellar" takes us back to "the Gun Powder Plot" which suggests the theme of failure in life.

The modern man doesn't have any faith is peace giving proposals which enrich their soul. In the words of Williamson:

The first lines bring the title and epigraph into critical relationship. We are like the old Guy effigies stuffed with straw.

The lines "Shape without form, Shape without colour, paralysed force, gesture without motion" suggest the loss of inner spirituality of people like the Inferno, modern men are not spiritually alive.

Then comes the eye imagery that takes us to the psychology of the sterile minds.

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams

In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column (19-23)

The eyes of the modern man should have been like the eyes of Beatrice which bring the beautiful vision of the awakened soul. They have not overcome their shadow and their illusion. They cannot awaken the hollow men to recover that is buried deep within him. The eyes of Death's other Kingdom are direct and forceful.

The hollow men do not have any vision as they are spiritually corrupt like sunlight on a broken column. Moreover their infirm religious faith has no meaning in day-to-day world. The fading star imagery that recurs in part III of the poem suggests the theme of the loss of vitality of the Hollow men. In Dante the star image is associated with God and Mary. So the poet may have used this imagery to set up the loss of faith in modern society. The Protagonist says that the star is not bright but is faded.

This is the dead land
This is Coctus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star. (39-44)
George Williamson makes the following observation on the imagery in this part of the poem.

The image of frustrated love which follows is a moment of anguished illumination suspended between the two kingdoms of death. "Walking alone" -- note quite out of the dream kingdom at a propitious time, lips that would adore pray instead to a broken image for the impulse is frozen. The broken stone unites the stone images and broken column which bent the sunlight.

Here the poet through the imagery, potrays this world as a lost kingdom. The civilization has nothing to give man a solid identity, a desire or meaning. The image of the multi foliate rose suggests the theme of church system and it indicates ritual elements in social life.

It is this church which by reason of its tradition, its organization and its relation to the past to the religious social life of the people, is the one for our purpose.

Here, the rose and star may bring some hope. Unfortunately these hollow men do not have any substance, any vision in identity and therefore no hope of life. To quote Williamson again:


But for empty men this is only a hope. As a star becomes rose, so the rose becomes the rose window of the church. The rose as an image of the church and multi-foliage appears in Dante's *Paradiso.*

Even the present church system has degenerated. It is because of the lack of the church idea at this time. Moreover, without this aim we relapse into the conflict between citizenship and church membership between public and private morality which makes moral life very difficult for every one. The idea of rose and star is only the hope of the empty men:

> Between the idea  
> And the reality  
> Between the motion  
> And the act  
> Falls the shadow (72-76)

Here the idea is related to Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* This shadow image is akin to the inertia of Prufrock and his incapability of connecting imagination with reality. So the hollow men fail to connect imagination and reality. 'Shadow' symbolises despair and the negation of the will. It also represents despair and empty hope.

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Eliot hints in the poem that compassion can expand man's narrow confinement and it needs self control and moral and emotional discipline. But shallowness and loss of personality have finished the real identity. As a result his existence has become meaningless and directionless and even shadowy. This theme obviously issues forth from the total content of the selected poems of Eliot from *Prufrock* to *The Hollow Men*. So the poem *The Hallow Men* ends on a despairing note. Helen Gardner rightly says:

> it (the poem) ends with an attempt to pray, or we may say it ends by finding prayer impossible.7

Thus, the poem takes us to the idea that the hollow men must wait for death to liberate them into the twilight of the final meeting and that there is a need for the preservation of spirituality and moral heritage.

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