CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION
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The subject of my thesis is *The Theory and Practice of Criticism* in T.S. Eliot. My concern is mainly with Eliot's prose work rather than this poetry. Professor Grant T. Webster in an article has said that it is time to look at Eliot's critical writings without their poetic halo — and that they have merits unconnected with Eliot's poetry. The subject in comprehensive, and I have tried as far as possible, to narrow the focus in order to direct it with force and sharpness at a particular frontier.

The books written about Eliot are chiefly concerned with his poetry and plays and only partially with his literary criticism. My attempt has been to make a systematic study of Eliot's criticism. Apart from the published books of Eliot, I have utilized materials usually inaccessible, in the form of reviews, introductions and prefaces, lying in different journals and periodicals of the past like *The Egoist, The Times Literary Supplement, The Dial, The Athenaeum* and *The Hudson Review*. It is my attempt to assess his contribution by considering his theorizing on general topics and individual authors and to find out the permanent and the reactionary, the real and the sham, the temporarily useful and the consistently illuminating in him.

I have included specially a chapter on Eliot's criticism of the novel and novelists because during the course of my research I discovered that Eliot had reviewed novelists. He has
written on Henry James, Mark Twain, Beyle and Balzac, James Joyce, Turgenev, besides an obituary on Virginia Woolf. And I have added a short study of Eliot's prose style and critical method.

Though Eliot's formulations are taken to be the byproduct of Eliot's poetry-workshop, it is possible that Eliot the critic may survive Eliot the poet. Eliot's poetry appears to us, sometimes, as a technical triumph. In the realm of poetry, one feels, one cannot go too far in Eliot's direction, as Eliot's poetry is found at times wanting in the human substratum.

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 at St. Louis, Missouri. He belonged to a cultivated New England family. In 1908 he entered Harvard University. There he attended the lectures of George Santayana and Irving Babbitt, and was influenced by them. In 1910-11 he was in Paris, studying French literature and Philosophy at the Sorbonne. Returning to America, he continued his study of Philosophy at Harvard and also received some instruction in Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy, spending a year in the mazes of Patanjali's metaphysics. He visited Germany on a traveling scholarship in 1913 and, in the first year of the war, was studying philosophy at Merton College, Oxford. He settled in England and his first mature poems were published in English periodicals in 1915-16. He taught for a time at Highgate School and later worked in a London bank.

After the war, he was an active contributor to London literary periodicals. He founded and edited The Criterion. He also
became a director of the publishing firm, Faber and Faber. He was naturalized as a British subject in 1927 and, in a volume of essays published in 1928, described his general point of view as "Classicist in literature, Royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion".

Eliot gives a hint about the background of his essays, specially his early critical essays. He writes in To Criticize the Critic:

*I was in reaction not only against Georgian poetry, but against Georgian criticism; I was writing in a context which the reader of to-day has either forgotten, or has never experienced.*

In the eighteen-eighties, "**Art for Art's sake**" was in vogue. It was a return to the Romantic pleasure-principle in literature. And criticism was taken to be, "**the adventure of a soul among masterpieces**". The critic was supposed just to talk about himself with reference to an author. Eliot said in his essay on Dryden: "**The twentieth century is still the nineteenth, although it may in time acquire its won character**". Shaw was one of the earliest writers of the new century to make "interrogation" an article of his faith. "**For Art's sake alone**, said Shaw, "**I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence**".

Eliot at his best, like Aristotle, substituted scientific inquiry, dispassionate dissection and assessment for subjectivism and the vagueness of impressionism. Nor dies he favour the sociological or the psychological criticism:
The Psychological and the Sociological are probably the two best advertised varieties of modern criticism; but the manner in which he problems of criticism are approached was never before so great or so confusing. Criticism seems to have separated into several diverse kinds.

Comparison and analysis, as Eliot says, are the chief tools of criticism. According to Eliot, a critic should have a highly developed sense of fact and a critic's task is to make the reader possessed of facts. In matters of great importance, Eliot points out, the critic should not make judgments of worse and better, he must simply elucidate.

T.S. Eliot is a very great critic indeed. He is, after all, a critic of comprehensive taste. He does not hesitate or feel shy in modifying or revising his critical opinions and attitudes. When modifying or revising his critical opinion and attitudes. When the light of a new experience is cast upon him, he shows his readiness to look at a work of art from a different angle. In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (92), Eliot extends much praise to John Donne's poetry for its speech rhythms, elaboration of a figure of speech to the furthest stage, and the telescoping of images and multiplied associations.

After 0 years, i.e., in 93, Eliot is somewhat critical of Donne's poetry and the fashion for it. A Garland for John Donne, Eliot writes that it is vain to deny that there is an element of fashion in our enjoyment and exploitation of Donne. He wishes simply to distinguish between the absolute
and the relative in popularity and to recognize in the relative (both when a poet is unduly preferred and when he is unduly ignored) an element of the reasonable, the just and the significant. He acknowledges that Donne is a greater master of language than Crashaw, Herbert, and Vaughan, but deplores the lack of a consistent viewpoint or some philosophic attitude to life in his work. In 93, he says that Donne’s mind should have been “philosophical” instead of being “legal and controversial”. He writes further in the same essay, A Garland for John Donne, that Donne is more interested in “ideas” themselves as objects than in the truth of the ideas. Donne’s scoffing attitude towards the fecklessness of woman may be hardly more than immature bravado.

Being impressed and guided by Ezra Pound, Eliot at one stage attached importance only to the criticism of critics who are themselves poets and practitioners. Later on, Eliot god rid of this bias and modified his views.

Between 1933 and 1946, Eliot revised and reversed most of his evaluations. And this feature in him is not to be condemned; it is rather to be appreciated as it points to his developing and progressing experience. Tennyson, whom Eliot scorned in 1922, was the object of serious and elevated commendation in 1936. In the same way, Yeats who, in 1922, was said to be outside the English tradition, was praised in the highest terms in 1933.

By 1934, Eliot had fruitfully contradicted or modified many of his literary and critical judgments implied in the
essay “The Metaphysical Poets”. He had praised not only Tennyson and Yeats but also Wordsworth and Coleridge who were more or less rejected in 1932. In 1937, when questioned during a radio interview on the B.B.C. about what he regarded as great poetry, he replied that Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” and Coleridge’s “Ode on Dejection” were probably the “touchstones of greatness”. This is, of course, very different from what Eliot had said earlier. In 936, Eliot quite condemned Milton, and charged him for corrupting the English language. Eliot had formed the impression that Milton could only be an unwholesome influence for any writer of any generation. In 1947, Eliot is not wholly of the same view:

I repeat: the remoteness of Milton’s verse from ordinary speech, his invention of his own poetic language, seems to me one of the marks of his greatness. 

And Eliot points out the cause:

We cannot, in literature, any more than in the rest of life, live in a perpetual state of revolution. If every generation of poets made it their task to bring poetic diction up-in-date with the spoken language, poetry would fail in one of its most important obligations. For poetry should help.... Refine the language of the time, but prevent it from changing too rapidly; a development of language at too great a speed would be a
development in the sense of a progressive deterioration, and that is our danger to-day. 9

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Eliot defines poetry in terms of impersonality, as “escape from emotion” and “escape from personality”. In his essay on W. B. Yeats, he is of the opinion that the great impersonality is forged of personality, that is, when there has been much of intensely felt emotional experience on the part of the poet.

In “The Function of Criticism” Eliot stresses the fact-finding duty of a critic and opines that a future critic may put even the laundry bills of Shakespeare to some use. Eliot is in favour of storing a piece of fact, even of the lowest degree. But in “The Frontiers of Criticism”, he is very critical of source-hunting and genesis-seeking aspect of a critic. He advises the critic to go directly to a work of art and analyse it and appreciate it, instead of indulging in extraneous details. That Wordsworth secretly loved Dorothy Wordsworth may be true, but it does not, as Eliot says, add to our enjoyment and understanding of the Lucy poems. Eliot is critical of “the explanation of poetry by examination of its sources”.

For myself, I can only say that knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding the poem: too much information about the origins of the poem may even break my contact with it...“ 10

Thus, we see that Eliot’s critical mind has solidity, comprehensiveness, awareness and range. His critical
sensibility is always developing and widening its frontiers and gaining richness and complexity. In “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca” (1927), Eliot writes that the poet makes poetry, the metaphysician makes metaphysics, the bee makes honey, the spider secretes a filament; one can hardly say that any of these agents believes; he merely does. In “Goethe as the Sage” (1955), Eliot writes:

......I have written ...in the past.... That the poet needs not believe a philosophical idea he has chosen to embody in his verse. Professor Heller is, no doubt, quite right in contradicting me. For such a suggestion would appear to be a justification of insincerity, and would annihilate all poetic values except those of technical accomplishment.  

And Eliot says further in the same essay that wisdom and poetry are inseparable in poets of the highest rank. Hence, to Eliot, finally, poetry or literature in general without tough reasonableness, consistent viewpoint, some system of thought or plausible belief, is like coffee without caffeine or tea without tannin.

In his numerous essays and lectures, he dwells upon almost every important aspect of literature and criticism.

He says brilliantly that the discipline of the critic is to learn on what grounds “not” to admire the poets whom he primarily loves, and to learn to love a little those poets whom he only frigidly admires. He points out that one of the tests—though it may be only a negative test—of anything really new
and genuine, seems to be its capacity for exciting aversion among — "lovers of poetry". In addition to the literary problems, he is seriously concerned with the major issues which vex the minds of modern thinkers. He is concerned with the survival of culture and civilization with the problem of values, and with religion and its impact on the creative mind. Thus, as a critic of life and letters, Eliot surveys the whole panorama of human experience. As a literary critic, Eliot is of opinion — that the literariness of a work of art can be ascertained by literary standards, but as a critic of life he maintains that the greatness of literature cannot be ascertained by purely literary considerations. Such statements of Eliot only confirm the richness and complexity of his critical ideas and formulations.

Eliot uses the word "moral" in the wider and profounder sense at several places. In a review, "Beyle and Balzac", he says that the superiority of Henri Beyle and Dostoevsky over Balzac is a moral one, in the sense that Beyle's work achieves greater reality and greater exploration and analysis of it. The aura of Balzac, Eliot says very aptly, sputters and goes out. In Balzac, Eliot continues, the fantastic element is not an extension of reality but an atmosphere thrown upon reality.

Eliot's opinions regarding literature and criticism are useful, illuminating and varied. He has focused light on varied aspects of many literary problems. Eliot writes in The use of Poetry that it is reasonable to be on guard against views
which claim too much for poetry, as well as to protest against those which claim too little, to recognize a number of uses for poetry, without admitting that poetry must, always and everywhere, be subservient to any of them. In the essay, “The Perfect Critic”, he is against the dogmatic and the purely “technical” critic for he takes criticism to be the “disinterested exercise of intelligence”.

In a review entitled “The Problem of the Shakespeare Sonnets” 8, Eliot says that there are two points on which the literary critic ought to support the textual critic: “in his reticence about the “autobiographical” element and in his reliance upon exact stylistic texts rather than upon enthusiasm. And he adds that when a literary critic attempts the ascription of a poem to an author, on the basis of his “feeling”, he will go very wrong indeed. In his essay – “Goethe as the Sage”, he writes aptly that literary criticism is an activity which must constantly define its own boundaries; also it must constantly be going beyond them, for he believes that one cannot go very far with Dante, or Goethe, without touching upon theology and philosophy, and ethics and politics.

F. R. Leavis, in a review “Eliot’s Stature as Critic” beings serious charges against Eliot as critic. He writes: “What was not at once apparent to all of those impressed was that some of the ideas, attitudes and valuations put into currency by Eliot were arbitrary…”12 And more: “It is not then a coherent conception of art that is figured in Eliot’s artist”. ‘The more perfect the artist, the more completely
separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates’ ... No one with Tolstoy in mind as the type of the great creative writer could have advanced the proposition: ‘separate’, for such a use, is not a possible word, whether one thinks of Tolstoy or Lawrence.... Or Shakespeare or George Eliot or Mark Twain.....It clearly is a most significant defeat of intelligence that presents itself to us in Eliot's essay.\textsuperscript{13}

Here, it seems, Dr. Leavis has not taken the context and the background of Eliot's essay and expression into consideration. Even apart from the context and time, Eliot's critical notion is not really inappropriate. Good art is only possible when the artist is not overstayed by his suffering or excessive emotional experience.

Some may not place Lawrence and Tolstoy in one category as Dr. Leavis has done. Lawrence, though a supreme artist, "\textit{whom it is idle to criticize}", seems to miss the greatness of Tolstoy. Tolstoy, it may be agreed, is in the profounder sense more "moral" than Lawrence. Regarding Lawrence, one is rightly reminded of Eliot's words – "\textit{the tragic waste of power}".

\textbf{F.R. Leavis} uses harsh words like "\textit{the absurdity of the dictum}"\textsuperscript{21} concerning Eliot's important formulation about the perfect artist. One is inclined to disagree with Dr. Leavis when he finds in the definition a significant defect of intelligence. In the early part of the twentieth century Eliot had to play the part of an iconoclast. He was obliged to exaggerate his stand in order to demolish the lingering romantic facades and habits.
Eliot like Arnold is a master of phrases and definitions. F.R. Leavis presents more damaging points about Eliot: “Eliot as critic has in general been not a profoundly or wholly engaged one. There is a sense in which he is too much of an intellectual”.

My claim for considering Eliot as a major critic rests on the fact that he is essentially a developing personality with sufficient courage and conviction to change or modify his views. In his early phase as a critic he stressed certain values which urgently required stressing. Naturally, Eliot emphasized the artefact, technical excellence in verse, structure and precision of expression as against the nineteenth century attitude. Later, Eliot interests widened as well as deepened and in fidelity to experience he modified his views. This is not intellectual flirtation with ideas; it is fidelity to the truth of one’s vision. Unfortunately, Dr. Leavis has written about Eliot in a pejorative and depreciative vein, that he is “too much of an intellectual”.

We do not have this kind of impression about Eliot, the critic, as a whole. He is not insensitive to the emotional value and aspect of literature. While introducing the poems of Miss Marianne Moore, he takes note of their emotional value:

*To the moderately intellectual, the poems may appear to be intellectual exercises; only to those whose intellect moves more easily will they immediately appear to have emotional value.*

And later:
We have to choose whatever subject-matter allows us the most powerful and most secret release; and that is a personal affair.\(^6\)

While introducing the poetry of Harold Monro, Eliot extends much praise to its originality and the personal vision. Eliot marks very appreciatively the note of individuality in the poetry of Harold Monro and says that Monro does not express the spirit of an age; he expresses the spirit of one man, but that so faithfully, that his poetry will remain as one variety of the infinite number of possible expressions of the tortured human consciousness. Eliot is not a "classicist" or "intellectual" in the limiting sense. At times he strikes us, in a very good sense, as having the sensibility of a fine romanticist. Eliot writes:

*Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others. The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain-path... Such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.*\(^7\)

Eliot is not unfeeling to "the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer". He whole-heartedly approves\(^27\) and gives full assent to A.E. Houseman's explanation of poetry: "...If I were obliged not to define poetry, but to name the class of things to which it belongs, I should call it a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like the pearl in the oyster...."
Eliot at one place writes that the desire to read the poetry of Pope is a test of one’s love for poetry. This may sound somewhat exaggerated but it is antidotal to one’s confinement to only one kind of poetry and of only one age. He exalts Dryden’s poetry but, at the same time, he is not ignorant of its limitation. This kind of attitude on the part of Eliot is to be understood in his own words. He writes in this context while introducing a book of Leone Vivante:

*He (the critic or artist-aesthete) should not be ashamed of exalting neglected artists of the past or of other languages and civilizations, even above their merit, in order to call attention to their value; if he is convinced that these are the most profitable subjects of study, and the best possible influences upon his own contemporaries and juniors.*

Eliot has a singular style of his own in the sense that he has no style; still it has unique force, clarity and flow. His style is lucid or translucent though the ideas and experiences may be complex.

One of the most captivating qualities of Eliot’s prose writings is that they are always *interesting*, besides being minutely critical. This quality does not leave Eliot even when he is expressing his most serious views about literature and criticism. No other critic except Dr. Johnson has this.

Delmore Schwartz has written an article with the title – “The Literary Dictatorship of T.S. Eliot”. To talk of the dictatorship of Eliot both as critic and poet, is not altogether
unjustified. It is true in the sense that the best criticism of our time is usually Eliot-oriented. The New Criticism has virtually taken its start from Eliot and I.A. Richards, although Eliot is disarmingly modest about it:

*I have been somewhat bewildered to find, from time to time, that I am regarded as one of the ancestors of modern criticism, if too old to be a modern critic myself...though I hope that as an editor I gave the new criticism, or some of it, encouragement and an exercise ground in The Criterion.*

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