

Modern man and Modernism as depicted in Rehman Rahi's "Suon Gaam" and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Drawing out the similarities between the two poems

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Abstract— Rehman Rahi and Eliot, the two giants of Kashmiri poetry and English poetry, respectively, have dealt with the concept of modernism and modern man. Rehman Rahi and T.S. Eliot have extensively drawn on the theme of modernization and modern man in their poems, "Suon Gaam" (Our Village) and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", respectively. The poets while working independently on the portrayal of the theme have excellently toyed with the senses of the readers whilst appealing the sense of imagination the most in trying to bring forth the problems of Modernization. This paper is concerned with the depiction of modern man and Modernism in these poems, the disillusionment of man, his concerns, his social status, his feelings of being a 'Nobody' and towards the end of his journey through the tracks of modernity, his appeal to people to return to faith and tradition. The paper also focuses on drawing out the similarities between the two poems.

Keywords— Disillusionment, Eliot, Faith, Modern man, Modernism, Nihilism, Rehman Rahi, Traditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kashmir lives in the works of Rahman Rahi, a Kashmiri poet, born on 6 March 1925 in Srinagar. He was awarded the Indian Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 for his poetry collection *Nawroz-i-Saba*, the Padma Shri in 2000 and India's highest literary award, the Jhanpith Award in 2007. On reception of his award, in 2007, Rahi said, "I am happy and sad", happy because I was honored, sad, because my people continue to be in distress". It was joyous moment blended with sorrow. "The award is not only an honor for my poetry but is also a recognition of language... the language of our speech and thought" [1], Rahi further added.

The frail looking Rahi, in whose poetry you may find a touch of Nietzsche's philosophy is aptly regarded as the greatest living poet of Kashmir. "He protected the Kashmiri language from Persian and Urdu influences. With his every written and spoken word he tries to bring forth the essential inclusiveness of Kashmiri culture-the Kashmiriyat" [2], said Bashir Manzar. While one may find traces of Nietzsche's philosophy in the works of Rahi there is an undoubted

parallel between the work "Suon Gaam" by Rahi and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" [3].

Winner of Noble Prize 1948, Eliot is an undoubted giant of modern literature. This poem thematically represents the modern times and depicts modern man. Because of the characteristics of these themes they have a universal appeal. In his poems the central characteristic feature of the protagonist is the lack of communication and self-imposed isolation. All these themes come to life in his poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". In the poem, the isolation and lack of communication is sexual, social, religious and vocational. The poem is an epitome of divided self, and a representation of "partition of the self".

Eliot's Prufrock is a middle aged man living a mediocre life, unable to live a life beyond doubtfulness, dullness, inadequacy, fear. He lacks decision making qualities and is hollow. Prufrock is an apt metaphorical representation of modern man and modernization.

II. DEPICTION OF MODERNISM AND SIMILARITIES IN THE POEMS

There are undoubted parallels between these works of the poets. To start with, both the poets wrote extensively on the theme of modernization and modern man. One can find disillusionment, discontent, isolation, distress in abundance. While drawing a parallel between Eliot's Prufrock and Rahi's "Suon Gaam" one cannot help but wonder whether the poem is a satirical remark on the man of modern times. While Rahi, with a dash of serendipity, talks about the traditions and cultures of villages, he does not shy away from depicting the shortcomings of the same. Rahi's "Village" like Eliot's Prufrock can be considered as a microcosm of modernism and modern man. Both Eliot and Rehman Rahi have drawn on the theme of how modernism has affected the psyche of man and led to disillusionment amongst men, and how the advancement had rendered modern man indecisive, contradictory and in Eliot's case "impotent".

Rahi begins his poem "Suon Gaam"^[4] by referring to the entire village as his own and urges the anonymous reader to never call his village "A City". He is of the opinion that while the village is the hub of religious harmony, the city is "thirsty" because of the conflict. The same kind of "thirst" can be noticed in the first stanza of Eliot's Prufrock where he has personified the evening in the city by comparing it to the "Etherized patient".

According to Rahi, the village is better off as a village, without the touch and contamination by modernism. It is in the villages that people appreciate what they have and pray for the springs to be promising, it is in villages people are real and do not participate in harmony for the sake of it. In the similar way, Eliot while talking about the city and city-life as, "lifeless, restless, and chaotic" and a life of uncertainty.

Rehman Rahi, satirically represents the village, and not the city, as having direct connection to the eternal, God, by asserting that "the Villages" receive "sap from deendharma". By subjecting it to modernism, it will be rendered "impure" and "thirsty". Eliot's poem too portrays the lack of connection between the city and the eternal by portraying this lack of connection as similar to the "lack of communication between men in the cities". This is further proven by the fact that Prufrock while bring aware of his shortcomings and his lack of communication skills makes no attempt to talk to all. This lack of attempt is the symbolic

representation of the fact that modern man has no internal or external connection with the Eternal.

One of the most striking resemblance between the two poems is their depiction of modernism. Rehman Rahi depicts modernism as 'crossroad' between tradition and modernity. He regards it as something that has derailed the children of the nation, drawn people away from each other and without good council; the children are turned into machines of war instead of gold. Modernism for Rahi is a place where the man comes and goes while making no attempt at doing something beyond his selfishness. The jest of this thought is similar to the lines from Eliot's poem where he says,

"In the room the women come and go,
Talking of Michelangelo".^[5]

This "room" is the same room where Prufrock is sitting and watching all the events unfolding in front of his eyes. While he is aware of his shortcoming, he makes no attempt at making a conversation, however, it must not go unnoticed that no other person is attempting to talk to him. Besides, the line also depicts the shallowness of modern woman in attempting to discuss something they actually know nothing about. And they do it for social pretence. This self centered pretentious attitude of modern man is a result of modernism and it is because of modernism that man has started looking at fellow men as foes.

Modernism by Eliot is very well depicted in his description of the city in the lines;

"The yellow fog that rubs its beach upon the window panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes".

This description of the city by Eliot is full of images that invoke in the reader the feeling of disgust. These images contrast to the beautiful and peaceful images of doves, Quran recitations, Shrine of Tsrar, golden showers from heaven", that Rehman Rahi draws in the beginning of his poem. Nonetheless, in their contradiction of the two aspects, both poets agree to the fact that modernism has led to compelling people to live life of uncertainty, not peaceful, and above all, not serene.

Rehman Rahi, while depicting the qualities of village, calls it "free and good", his attribution is followed by his fierce comparison of the people of this village to "haggard hag". He is of the opinion that while there are certainly some good qualities that people possess, modernism mars these qualities and replaces them with selfishness, self-

centeredness and deception of modern man. It is clearly shown in the lines from “Suon Gaam”;

“Eating and drinking too only us...

Playing and prancing too only us...”

The same kind of self-centeredness is shown by Eliot in his protagonist Prufrock, who considers himself as the all-knowing. He believes he has all the knowledge of human nature and its problems. Under the umbrella of deception, he self-labels himself as social outcast, however, his this kind of self-importance and self-centeredness makes him more of a social elite than a social outcast.

Besides materializing the selfishness of modern man, Rahi very well illustrates the loss of religious values of modern man in the line “...throw a recitation party too I will, if successful is my charas venture”. Here, Rahi attempts to throw light upon the fact that earlier whenever people started a new venture, they would have Quran recitation ceremonies; however, modernism has rendered modern man shallow to the point that he wishes to have a similar recitation once his drug venture is successful. The loss of religious values can also be seen very clearly in the lines;

“It is here I saw in a garden Shakti in embrace of Shiva held,
It is here in tightly draped rooms that blue films are beheld”

Rehman Rahi, draws a figure of sadness when he talks about how religion and religious ceremonies in the village have been replaced by vulgarity, deceit and an addiction to pornography.

According to Eliot too, modern man suffers from spiritual paralysis. He confirms the thought when he says, “shape without form.../Paralyzed force.” Modernity, according to Eliot, has reduced a man to nothing but an empty vessel and an epitome of nihilism. Similar to Rahi’s figure of sadness, a sad figure is noticed in Eliot’s Prufrock when he talks about how the life of modernism has reduced men to “lonely...and leaning out of the windows.” Eliot in the beginning of the poem warns the reader of the spiritual paralysis in the epigraph taken from Dante’s *Inferno*. In the poem, the protagonist perceives his urban life as “Hell”. Moreover, Prufrock is aware of the lack of spiritual core in him; when he refers to all men as “hollow men”.

The similarity is once again noticed when both the poets talk about the institutions of modernization with contempt and uncertainty. Rahi urges the people to return to the traditional ways of living “Let Germans launch missiles; we will take a boat to Nishat from here.” He enlightens people

that even though modernism may bring about development, it also brings along with it, the weapons of destruction. Eliot predicts the same destruction by modernism in his poem by using the images of the city life, “an image of the streets, chimneys, drains” to bring to light the destructive and disgusting nature of modernism.

Towards the end of the poem, Eliot’s protagonist is disillusioned and indecisive about everything in his life. The only images clear to him are that of his “drowning” until a “human voice” wakes him up to free him from the clasps of modernism and nihilism. Eliot has thus, excellently and sincerely, mapped out the journey of the “neurotic, lonely, impotent” man, in the beginning of the poem, to a man realizing his “moral emptiness and meaninglessness”. Prufrock becomes an example of a modern man devoid of meaning and goal and his spiritual transcendence into becoming “Someone” through “faith, culture, tradition” and not modernism. His calling out for the “human voice is the symbolic representation of his attempts to return to faith and shun disillusionment brought about by modernism.

Rahi, through his poem, attempts to be that “human voice” that Prufrock longs for, and urges the people to not forget that this is the land of “Rishis and Dervishes”, the Mountains and the Temperament, the Tradition and the Philosophy. He says, “This is the land of Rishis from every corner are expected offerings”. He pushes people not to get trapped in the vicious circle of modernity. He enlightens his men by reminding them that “We nurture faith, to whatever rises like a sun we offer our prayers”. Like Eliot, who through Prufrock’s journey attempts to bring back people to faith, Rahi too attempts to be that ‘human voice’ and remind the modern man of his “village” and that he is a Kashmiri, wearing a “Pheran”, and all his claims to state otherwise are null and void.

III. CONCLUSION

In nutshell, one can say that both the poets have represented the theme of Modernism in their works with utmost genius. There are also undoubted attempts by the poets to express their poetic free will in depicting the cons of the times they lived in and highlighting the question of be-ing raised by modernism. Time and again, the paper highlights the theme of modernism and modern man’s disillusionment, distress, chaos, self-centeredness and spiritual hollowness by highlighting the independent metaphorical journeys of a ‘village’ and a ‘man’ in the poems and what modernism does

to them. The explicit representation of the theme in the two poems by drawing out the similarities between the two helps in creating an impactful effect on the reader and suggests a way out of chaos, in this case, the way out is faith, religion and going back to the traditions.

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