



Eliot's Concept of Culture & its Relevance in the 21st Century

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Abstract:

Eliot has experienced the emotional and spiritual sterility of the modern world and found the fast decay of finer cultures in contemporary society. He felt the isolation of the present from the past values, and he felt the need for the presence of the 'pastness of the past'. He thought that the present malady was the decay of a rich culture. He was also aware of the misconception of the term culture and its gross misuse. To Eliot, culture is the culture of the individual, of the group and the culture of the society. A culture which does not talk about any relation to these three senses is not culture. In 'Notes,' Eliot depicts the malady of the modern scene of cultural disintegration. It is painful for him to see that all cultural activities are divorced from each other, and the artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility. According to Eliot, indifference to any activity of culture is undoubtedly a mark of the decline of culture. This paper intends to find the relevance of Eliot's concept of culture in the present juncture of time.

Introduction

The Inevitability of Diverse Culture

Eliot is sure that no culture can be grown or preserved in a classless society. He observes that each class is responsible for protecting its culture. According to him, no culture is supreme, which should be shared by all. Each class, if it preserves its culture, contributes to the general growth of the society's culture. He is against establishing a classless society where culture cannot grow.

Eliot does not want to restore a vanished or vanishing culture. Nevertheless, he wants to grow a contemporary culture from its old roots and insists that religion should be a vital cultural element. For him, culture is incarnated in religion, and he firmly believes that religion offers hope in a hopeless world. He stresses the cultural significance of the religious divisions. Eliot hoped religion had the potential to improve the quality of life by fostering the growth of the culture.

For Eliot, an excellent trinity of culture, sex and religion is humanity's goal, and the sickness of modern civilisation is that these three impulses operate in isolation from each other. Hence Eliot talks about the relationship between education and culture. He does not consider education as a chief transmitter of culture, and he asserts that family, a much

closer unity than educational institutions, is the primary transmitter of culture.

He pushes to undesirable extremes the notion of equality of education. He sees the danger in imparting universal education since it may adulterate and cheapen the quality of education. Eliot's analysis of education and culture emphasises the interrelation of education's occupational, social and individual aspects. While talking about education, Eliot feels the necessity of classical learning, which will nourish the learners' minds. He further states that even to produce great writings which will foster a rich culture, the sense of the whole history of the past should be in our bones. He believes the elites must represent their respective classes rather than meet like committees. For him, education is an effective tool to sharpen the intellect to provide a rich soil for the growth of the culture.

Threat to diverse culture

When Eliot talks about politics and culture, he attempts to disentangle the misuse of culture from politics. He finds all 'isms', such as Communism, Nazism, Liberalism, and Imperialism, have posed a significant threat to a good culture. He is well aware of the exploitation of cultural consciousness in developed nations. He does not discuss politics for the sake of politics, but he talks about its relevance to human life. Eliot rises against imperialism, citing an example of its danger in British rule in India. At the same time, he opines that liberalism is also undesirable for the growth of the culture. He states that liberalism destroys traditional social habits of the people and presents a 'negative' culture. It offers only a negative conception of culture. Eliot finds its solution in a Christian society. Eliot's sense of politics is highly cultural. If we have a perception of politics in its usual, general sense—voting, Organizing, running for office, leading marches or affecting elections, we cannot call Eliot apolitical. He is not merely a 'royalist in politics' but also an 'Anglo-Catholic in religion'. So, he essentially connects politics with religion.

He believes that religion makes life more meaningful and worth living. He thinks that no culture can be grown in any society except without taking shelter of religion. For Eliot, culture is a 'whole way of life', and it embodies all human activities. Social friction and cohesion are necessary for the continuity of culture. He is against the notion that culture can be consciously planned and that it is the unconscious background of all planning.

Relevance: A Testimony of Timelessness

After reading 'Notes', one feels relieved that in an age which is much in the grip of abstractions of limited validity, someone can face up to the profundities of human beings and the dilemmas in which they find themselves. Eliot bears witness to the most profound problems of our times in his 'Notes'. He relates issues to a situation integral to our decaying moral order. It can be expressed in various terms, in the conflict between individual and society, form and content, spontaneity and convention. What is at the anvil fundamentally is the relationship between inheritance and evolving new life. Throughout the Notes, there are many observations about the present condition, with which many people would agree. In short, Eliot is concerned about the ills of our modern society, the decay of religious belief, the vulgarisation of culture, the inability of finer thinking, the absence of a discriminating intelligence, and the hypocrisies of false notions. The bankruptcy of protestant theology,

the decline in natural piety, the commercial exploitation of natural resources, the contempt for the past, and the incapability of society to offer rich human experiences to its inhabitants. He firmly believed that amid the ambiguities of the modern world, those who experience ambivalence could provide solutions to the ailments of contemporary society.

Works cited

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