



**Modernism and the Fragmentation of Human Identity in T. S. Eliot's
Poetry**

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Abstract

This paper aims to look at the modernism and the disintegration of human identity in T. S. Eliot's poetry. Modernism came out as a strong literary and cultural movement as a response to the social, moral, psychological and spiritual crisis of the early 20th century. The world, which arose from the First World War, industrialization, urbanization and the waning of religious belief and traditional values, was a world of uncertainty, alienation and inner conflict. One of the most important modernist poets, T. S. Eliot was a voice for this troubled state of modern civilization. In his poetry he portrays modern man as lacking in spirit, split in mind and heart, as a lonely, individual man. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, The Waste Land, The Hollow Men and Ash-Wednesday, show different aspects of the broken identity. Prufrock is the figure of hesitation, of fear and of self-consciousness, The Waste Land is the paragon of spiritual death of the modern spirit, The Hollow Men is the symbol of inner emptiness and moral weakness, and Ash-Wednesday is a gesture towards spiritual search and eventual redemption from fragmentation. The idea of divided human identity is emphasized by Eliot's poetic devices such as the fragmented structure, multiple voices, symbolism, allusions, mythical method, and broken images. The paper posits that Eliot's poetry is not only descriptive of the modern crisis, but it is a dramatization of the inner collapse of modern human consciousness. Eliot's modernist perspective reveals the tragedy of man who have lost their faith, cultural continuity, moral certainty, and sense of self.

Keywords: Modernism, T. S. Eliot, Fragmentation, Human Identity, Alienation, Spiritual Crisis, *The Waste Land*, *Prufrock*, *The Hollow Men*, Modernist Poetry

Introduction

Modernism is one of the most important movements in literature and culture in the twentieth century. It did come out of a time of great social, political, moral and psychological transformation. The early twentieth century was marked by the rapid industrialization, urbanisation, scientific progress, loss of traditional religious beliefs and the devastating experience of the First World War. These were revolutionary departures from the former concepts of stability, order, morality and human purpose. The modern person felt insecure, lonely and uncertain in a world bereft of fixed values and clear meanings (Bradbury and McFarlane 25). Thus, modern literature transcended traditional forms and started to reflect the fragmented, complex and perplexed state of modern life. Modernism in English literature was an anti-simplification of narrative, anti-simplification of meaning and anti-conventionality of poetic expression. All the old literary forms were not adequate to capture the crisis of the modern era as felt by modernist writers. Human experience itself had been divided, so also was literature, which had to be divided; the voices had to change and the imagery become complex



and symbolic. Modernist poetry frequently imagines a world where human persons are alienated from society, isolated from tradition and split in themselves. This inner division turns into one of the primary issues in modernist literature (Lewis 3).

T. S. Eliot is one of the most important poets of modernist English poetry. His poems vividly express the spiritual, emotional and psychological distress of modern man. Eliot doesn't show human identity as solid, confident and complete. Rather, his poetry reflects a modern identity that is broken, uncertain and fractured. His poetry is replete with lonely people, barren societies, disoriented voices, unsuccessful communication and an agnostic longing for meaning. In Eliot's poetry, he shows a modern civilization where human beings have become estranged from their faith, culture, tradition and even their internal selves. Fragmentation of human identity is very much a theme in Eliot's poetry. In poems such as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, Eliot portrays modern individuals who are unable to act, speak, believe or love with confidence. Prufrock is rife with doubt, fear and hesitation. The characters of *The Waste Land* inhabit a bleak, spiritually lifeless world in which love has become "a mechanical repetition of sound, a senseless repetition of words. The hollow men are those who have no moral or spiritual soul. These characters do not have a clear identity because they are the broken consciousness of the modern era (Leavis 75).

This idea of fragmentation is also upheld by Eliot's technique. His poems are broken images, sudden shifts, multiple voices, literary allusions, religious reference and symbolic landscapes. The form of his poetry is also somewhat disjointed, like the self of modern man is. In *The Waste Land*, various voices, various languages, various myths and historical references are juxtaposed in an attempt to demonstrate the disarray of twentieth-century civilization. This disjointed form is not a literary experiment, but a reflection of the disjointedness of modern human life. The title "Modernism and the Fragmentation of Human Identity in T. S. Eliot's Poetry" is thus taken up by the discussion of the line between modernism and Eliot's depiction of human identity (Childs 4). It examines Eliot's poetry in the context of Eliot's presentation of a modern individual who is alienated, spiritually empty, psychologically divided and culturally displaced. The problem of contemporary man is not only social and historical, but also a question of his self. The modern man has lost trust, moral guidance, emotional attachment and a sense of self. So Eliot's poems are a significant literary portrayal of modern man. His poems show the tragedy of the modern world in which men and women seek meaning in a broken world (Nicholls 2). The theme of fragmentation is Eliot's way of showing the anxiety, loneliness and spiritual emptiness of the twentieth century. His poetry continues to be important because it is not just about contemporary life, it is a profound exploration of the inner crisis of modern human identity.

Modernism: Historical and Literary Background

Modernism is a liter, artistic and cultural movement that emerged primarily in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was particularly strong following the First World War. The modernism was not just an artistic movement, it was a reaction to the profound transformations in society, culture, religion, politics, and human thought. The modern era brought a feeling of insecurity, instability and even unease. The influence of the former values of faith, traditions, moral order



and social harmony were on the decline. This inspired writers and poets to seek alternative means of expression to capture the altered state of mankind. The modern world is a fast-changing world, and so, historically, did modernism. Structural change of society had occurred due to industrialization. Individuals flocked from the countryside to urban centers and urban life was mechanical, impersonal. Changes in the relationships and daily life of man were brought about by machines, factories and technology. The modern city was a symbol of speed, loneliness and artificial life. Modern civilization has produced emotional emptiness and spiritual isolation as well as scientific progress and material development. Man was more integrated with machines, less connected with each other (Lewis 5).

Modernist notion was profoundly influenced by the First World War. The war ended the concept of the moral superiority of western civilization, its rationality, and its progressiveness. The violence of war left in its wake a feeling of horror, disillusionment and meaninglessness, with millions dead. A sense of disillusionment set in with writers, concerning the old notions of heroism, patriotism, religion, and moral certainty. The war revealed the fragility of civilised man and engendered a crisis in the faith of mankind. This crisis was one of the main issues for modernist writers (Nicholls 4).

The loss of religious belief and traditional morals were also a factor in shaping modernism. During past eras, religion served as a stable structure to comprehend life and death, morality and human purpose. In the modern era, however, such religious conviction was undermined by scientific advances, rationalism and materialism. A lot of people felt a sense of emptiness in their spiritual lives. In the modern person there was no longer any certainty of the meaning of life or of Absolute Truth. This loss of faith produced inner emptiness, anxiety and confusion, the latter of which is clearly evident in modernist poetry (Abrams and Harpham 226).

Modernism in literature abandoned traditional form and techniques of writing. Previous writings were more often structured, chronological, with characters consistent and with clear meanings. Modernist writers believed that these forms could not convey the shattered and intangled reality of the modern world. Thus, they adopted fresh literary stylistic devices like fragmentation, symbolism, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, multiple voices, mythical references and complex imagery. These methods enabled them to portray the fragmented personality and confused consciousness of today's human beings. Modernist literature emphasizes the inner reality rather than outer events. The modernist writers were interested in the mind, memory, fear, desire, doubt, and unconscious thoughts of human beings and did not only record external action. They demonstrated that the present-day man is not a thoroughly formed and balanced character (Childs 18). He is torn between himself. Uncertainty, loneliness, loss of faith and failure of communication, define his identity. Therefore, the term fragmentation evolved into a theme and a technique in modernist writing. Modernism was a turning point in his use of language, form and subject in poetry. In the modernist era, poets abandoned regular rhyme and simple rhythm, as well as decorative language. These employed free verse, broken lines, abrupt transitions and symbolic images. Their poetry can sometimes seem hard due to the hardships of contemporary life. Modernist poetry is broken, as is modern civilization. T. S. Eliot's poetry is one of the most fine examples



of this modernist method. Modernist techniques were used by T.S. Eliot to convey the human predicament of identity. In poems such as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, Eliot portrays people who are lonely, reticent, empty of spiritual and psychological fulfillment (Nicholls 7). His poetry captures that of modernism's time, of war, of urbanization, of loss of faith, of moral decay, of cultural chaos. Eliot's broken-up style is directly related to the broken-up nature of contemporary man. Thus, the historical and literary background of modernism is based on crisis, change and uncertainty. It is an outgrowth of war, industrialization and urban isolation and loss of traditional values, historically. Literary, it shaped as a novel means for conveying the complicated and fractured nature of modern life. Modernism provided writers with permission to break free from the accepted conventions of form, language and structure. It was a powerful movement because it was a true expression of the inner struggle, spiritual emptiness and the sense of disintegration of modern human beings.

- **Meaning of Modernism**

Modernism is a significant literary, artistic and cultural movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was in opposition to the traditional methods of thought, belief and artistic expression. It was a very modern era, characterized by the fast-paced industrialization, urbanization, scientific advancement, war, loss of religious certainty and deterioration of old moral values. These changes had a profound impact upon human life and a feeling of uncertainty, loneliness, fear and emptiness. Modernism was not just a shift in literary style; it was a new way to view human life in an unsettled world in the midst of change. In literature, the older view that life could be rendered in terms of simple order, fixed meaning and stable identity was rejected in the name of Modernism. The common features of traditional literature were a well-developed plot, a single character, a moral judgement and a meaningful social order (Kenner 42). Modernist writers believed that these forms are unable to convey modern reality. The world was modern, broken, complex and confusing, so was the modernist literature too. Tristan Murail, who was followed by Marguerite Duras, Georges Doumic, and Michel Carmon, is the first of the post-classical writers to employ free verse, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, broken images, sudden shifts, multiple voices, and mythological references. These methods enabled them to represent the 'inner conflict and psychological disturbance of modern man'. Modernism also helped to shift the definition of what it means to be a human being. The person has been frequently depicted in previous literature as a whole, mature personality. The individual, however, is uncertain, divided and alienated in modernist literature. The connection between modern man and society, tradition, religion and his inner self is not clear. In a world where old values have lost their ability to give him certainty, he lives in a world where new values are not yet able to do so. This situation leads to disintegration of identity (Matthiessen 87). The modern person ends up with a fragmented sense of a self, engulfed in uncertainty, fear, isolation and a spiritual crisis. T. S. Eliot writes in *The Waste Land*:

**Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess,**



**For you know only
A heap of broken images.**

T. S. Eliot's famous modernist poem *The Waste Land* is here. "A heap of broken images" is significant in the context of understanding Modernism. It implies that today's society is fractured, unstable and lacks spiritual significance. Today the world is comprised of shattered values, shattered memories, shattered beliefs and shattered identities. This image is used by Eliot to demonstrate that man today does not inhabit a complete and harmonious world. He resides among fragments, meaning is scattered and his identity is disturbed. Modernism in Eliot's poetry is an expression of the crisis of the modern human condition. Eliot's poems show life not as simple, ordered or peaceful. They depict a world in which there is no spiritual juice, no emotional intimacy, no communication, no cultural coherence. In his characters, like the *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and the *Hollow men* in *The Hollow Men*, he can't act, speak or believe with confidence (Southam 92). They are self-divided, empty, fearful and hesitant. In those images Eliot portrays modern identity as fractured and unstable. So, Modernism is a literary movement that reflects the fractured nature of modern reality in innovative and experimental ways. It stands for the loss of trust, fall of tradition, issue of values and disintegration of man's identity. T. S. Eliot's poetry is not only a background movement of Modernism, but theme, language and structure are all dictated by it. In Eliot's modernist poetry, the modern human being is not complete and secure, but divided, lonely and spiritually searching in a fragmentary world (Kenner 64).

- **Social and Historical Context of Modernism**

The social and historical context of Modernism is linked to the great transformation in Europe and America in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Modernism did not come about in literature as a literary craze but as a serious reaction to the unsettled state of modern life. Industrialization, urbanization, scientific and technological advancements, political strife, war, loss of belief and disintegration of traditional social values were characteristics of the modern era. These changes had a profound impact on the thinking of modern man. The man started to perceive a loss of the traditional world of order, certainty and moral stability (Childs 18). The crisis, confusion and displacement gave birth to modernist literature. Industrialization was one of the most significant social factors of Modernism. The industrialization of factories, machines and technology revolutionized society. In earlier life, life was interwoven with nature, family, community and religion but industrial society brought a mechanical and impersonal life. Man joined a quick moving city system. The machine was a symbol of progress and of emotional distance and spiritual emptiness. Modern writers noted that material advancement wasn't enough to make human life meaningful. Rather, it frequently resulted in feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and alienation. The Modernism movement was also greatly influenced by urbanization. Modern life focused its centers in big cities. Cities provided jobs, rapid transit, mobility, and modern amenities, but they also provided isolation. The person often felt lonelier than he or she had ever felt in the midst of the city (Moody 47). Relationships with people became fragile and fleeting. Emotionally people were separated from one another, although they lived in close proximity. The modern city was a thing of confusion, artificiality and loss

of identity. This is an especially strong description of this condition, as given by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*. In *The Waste Land*, T S Eliot writes:

**Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many**

These lines indicate that the current city is unreal, hazy and devoid of spirit. Eliot does not show a vibrant London, but rather a place of emptiness and confusion. People walking across London Bridge indicate modern man's mechanical existence, devoid of emotional or spiritual life. They are a part of the city, but do not seem to be fully alive. The image is so deeply associated with the social context of Modernism as it portrays loneliness, a loss of individuality and a disintegration of human identity in the city. Another important historical precedent to Modernism was the First World War. The war shattered the confidence in the rationality, morality and progress of Western civilization. The war left people feeling disillusionment over the violence, death and destruction. Trust in institutions of government, society and ethics wanes. The notions of heroism, patriotism and religious conviction were suspect. There arose a sense among writers that the world was shattered and senseless. Thus, modernist literature often depicts a world with no order, harmony or spiritual comfort (Abrams and Harpham 226). The influence of religion and traditional morality also played a role in the development of modern thought. In earlier days religion provided people with a sense of purpose, moral direction and spiritual unity. However, today, science, materialism and rationalism undermined a traditional belief. A lot of people started to feel like they were homeless in their spiritual lives. They were no longer exclusively led by religion; nor did they completely enjoy modern material living. This led to a crisis of faith. Dryness, barrenness, emptiness and silence have been the imagery Eliot uses over and over again to illustrate his spiritual crisis.

Modernism is also an expression of “stable identity” that is socially broken. No strong community, religion or traditional moral framework was to shield the modern individual. He found himself torn between past and present, between faith and doubt, between desire and fear, between public life and private anxiety. This split state was one of the most important motifs of modernist literature. Modern man is frequently at a loss for words, hesitant in action, and unable to believe wholeheartedly in Eliot's poetry. The world in which he lives is broken up, and so is his identity. Thus, the social and historical context of Modernism is based on crisis and transformation. Life became mechanical through industrialization, life became lonely through urbanization, and war destroyed faith in progress, while the decline of religion led to spiritual emptiness. The conditions were to create a new type of literature with a fragmented form, symbolic language, and rich imagery (Nicholls 5). Literature came to be the voice of a fractured modernity. This background is manifested in T. S. Eliot's poetry in the imagery of the unreal city, of a broken civilization, of spiritual emptiness and of split manhood.

- **Features of Modernist Poetry**

Modernist poetry features new forms, new techniques and a new approach to human experience. It emerged out of the crisis of the modern age particularly since industrialization, urbanization and the First World War. Traditional poetry forms were not seen as being enough

to convey the fractured, confused and uncertain state of modern life by the modernist poets. Hence for them, the fragmentation of the structure, symbolic language, psychological profundity and experimental techniques were adopted. These characteristics are readily apparent in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, as he portrays modern man as lonely, spiritually empty and torn in two (Brooks 142).

1. Fragmented Structure

One of the key characteristics of modernist poetry is its fragmented structure. That the poem doesn't go in a straightforward, linear or conventional sequence. Modernist poems lack the traditional structure of a beginning, a middle and an end. Modernist poems don't always have a clear beginning, a clear middle and a clear end; they often contain broken scenes, sudden shifts, disconnected images and multiple voices. This is a structure of the present-day broken civilization. In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the poem moves from one voice to another, from one place to another and from one cultural reference to another. A weakness in the poem is not the fragmentation, but the intended emphasis of the modernist technique. The broken form in Eliot's poem is used to illustrate the fractured identity of the modern man. The form of the poem reflects what is ailing the contemporary world: confusion, emptiness and chaos in the culture (Southam 104).

2. Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a literary technique that shows the continuous flow of thoughts, feelings, memories and impressions that happen in the human mind. It was a technique employed by modern poets and writers to reveal the inner life of modern man. They did not just look at what can be done outside of themselves, but at the inner realm of fear, doubt, wishes and anxieties. The mind of the speaker is frequently distracted and fractured in Eliot's poems. The speaker's mind in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* oscillates between self doubt, fear, wish, hesitation, imagination and reality. This movement is the result of a state of modern man's confused consciousness. Eliot throws some light on this technique which makes it clear that modern identity is fluid and not a consistent or permanent entity, but one that has been formed through conflict and inner disturbance (Leavis 77).

3. Symbolism

Another aspect of modernist poetry is that of symbolism. Poets today tend to employ symbols in a manner that conveys complicated ideas indirectly. A symbol is an image, object, place or situation which represents something else and has a meaning that goes beyond its literal one. In his poetry, Eliot is an extremely powerful user of symbols. The dry land, water, dust, ruins, and the barren landscapes in *The Waste Land* are used to represent spiritual emptiness, a moral decay, and the loss of life-force in modern civilization. The hollow men in *The Hollow Men* represent contemporary man's emptiness inside. They lack strong faith, courage and total identity. Eliot does not say what the crisis of modern man is, but sets it up with a force of images and implication (Childs 52).

4. Mythical References

Mythical references are also a significant aspect of modernist poetry. The modernist poets used myths, religious stories and ancient cultural references to bridge the gap between the past and

the modern world. The mythical method was used by T. S. Eliot. By this means, he juxtaposed ancient myths and religious language with the modern world, and demonstrated the disparity between an ancient meaningful world and the modern meaningless one. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses references from different cultures, religions and literary traditions. It is from these references that we can infer that there has been a loss of spiritual and moral unity in modern civilization compared to earlier civilization. The mythological references also add richness to Eliot's poetry since they demonstrate that the problem of the modern man is not only personal but cultural and historical (Kenner 41).

5. **Broken Images**

The splintered structure of modernist poetry is closely related to broken images. Modernist poems don't usually provide the image of a smooth, complete or beautiful image. Rather, they provide disjointed, unsettling and fragmentary images. These fractured images are the fractured world of modern man. Eliot's use of the image of dust, fog, dryness, ruins, shadows, and hollow figures gives an impression of decay and emptiness to his poems. The images here imply a sense of dissonance and loss of harmony, faith and emotional connection in modern life. The shattered image turns into a symbol of shattered identity. In these images Eliot demonstrates that the modern man does not exist in a full and complete world; he exists in a world of fragments of culture, memory, belief and desire (Eliot 20–22).

6. **Psychological Depth**

Psychological depth refers to the study of things from the inner experience and human mind. Modernist poetry is not just about what happens out there and what does on the surface. It goes inside the mind of the individual and presents fear, loneliness, guilt, desire, hesitation and self-doubt. Poems of T. S. Eliot have a great deal of psychological content. His speakers aren't easygoing or assertive personalities. They are split, anxious and hesitant. Prufrock, for instance, has some hesitation and inferiority. He wants to say and do something but he is paralyzed by fear. The *Hollow Men* are lacking of spirit and soul. They are those who are living but with no life within. Eliot imagines the modern man through such characters as experiences himself as a fragmented self. So then the technical devices are not just the main defining features of modernist poetry, but expressions of the modern crisis as well. Disordered structure of the modern life. Stream of consciousness is the disorganized thought process of the twentieth century. Behind the message of symbols lie deeper spiritual and emotional meanings. The contemporary crisis is linked to cultural history through references to the mythical. Images that are broken show the lack of unity and meaning. Psychological depth reveals the inner split of today's man. All these features are present in T. S. Eliot's poetry and help to illustrate the modern fragmentation of human identity (Brooks 140).

T. S. Eliot as a Modernist Poet

T. S. Eliot is one of the most important poets in modern English. He is considered to be one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century for his direction, new form and intellectual depth in modern poetry. Eliot's poetry was still intimately related to romantic emotion, personal expression, musical rhythm and traditional poetic beauty, but before him much English poetry had been. Eliot broke with this poetic tradition by writing in a new style of poetry which

conveyed the crisis of the modern age. He does not offer a view of life that is simple, beautiful, harmonious in his poetry. Rather, it depicts modern life as fractured, jumbled, despiritualized and psychopathic. Thus Eliot became one of the significant figures of Modernism.

Eliot's significance in contemporary English poetry is that he was the one who could convey the state of mind of modern civilization. The contemporary world was in a condition of loss of faith, moral decay, cultural disharmony and emotional lack. Eliot knew that the conventional poetic forms were inadequate to capture this fractured state of life. Thus, he relied on both experimental approach and complex poetic techniques (Matthiessen 97). The poems, *The Hollow Men*, *The Waste Land*, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, are expressions of the fear, hesitation, loneliness and spiritual crisis of modern man. In these poems, Eliot demonstrates that modern identity in his time is fractured and ambiguous. Eliot is a poet of great modernism. He employs fragmented narration, symbols, allusions, mythical references, multiple voices, multiple scenes and objective correlative. His poetry does not move in a simple linear manner. It tends to jump from one visual imagery to another, one vocalization to another and one cultural frame of reference to another. This is a broken up form, a broken up life. In *The Waste Land*, for instance, there are other voices, other languages, references to religion, mythological images and dislocated scenes. This is a method to demonstrate the lack of unity and order of modern civilization (Leavis 77).

Symbols are one of Eliot's most significant devices. The words: dry land, dust, fog, shadow, hollow men, dead trees, broken images refer to deep meanings in his poetry. These symbols represent the spiritual barrenness and emptiness of today's civilization. Eliot also makes reference to biblical, mythological, classical and world culture. These allusions tie the modern world together with the old world and demonstrate a decline in spiritual strength of modern civilization compared to the ancient world. His approach to poetry is 'mythical' which gives depth to his poetry because you are comparing the meaningful past with the meaningless present. Another key concept which helps to explain Eliot's poetic method is his use of the objective correlative. Eliot does not state the emotion, but presents an image, situation or object that evokes the emotion in the reader. This accounts for his poetry's impersonality and its drama. Not only is modern man empty, or is full of it; he is not simply full of it, but full of empty, elaborated, and isolated places. He is a man in whom silence has been frozen. He is not simply full of it, but full of empty, elaborated and isolated places: he is a man in whom silence has been frozen. Thus Eliot's poetic procedures are closely associated with his theme of fragmentation. In *The Hollow Men*, T. S. Eliot writes:

**We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw.**

These lines definitely express Eliot's perception of the characteristics of today's man. "Hollow men" implies that people are physically alive but spiritually dead. They have bodies and voices and social existence, but they are weak, have no faith, no courage, no moral completeness. They are intellectually weak and spiritually empty in their "headpiece filled with straw". Eliot's

Eliot is a man in the modern era who is unwhole and incomplete. He cannot grasp a profound thought, stand confidently or live a meaningful life. Eliot's attitude to modern man is, as always, pessimistic but very realistic. Eliot believes that man is today weak in spiritual strength and divided in his emotions. He is isolated from society, religion, tradition and his own soul. Prufrock is the modern person, who is uncertain and unsure in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. He has a desire to speak, love and act, however, he cannot do so due to fear and insecurity in his mind. The Waste Land is a work about a spiritually empty world, characterized by interrelationships which have become mechanical and devoid of meaning, in which modern people live (Gardner 87). In The Hollow Men, human beings are shown as empty figures without faith, purpose or complete identity. Therefore, T. S. Eliot is a Modernist poet in that his themes and techniques are the crisis of the modern era. His poetry is a paradigm of modern man's fractured consciousness. The modern world is a world of loss, confusion and emptiness, Eliot shows through the fragmented structure, the symbolic language, the allusions, the multiple voices and the spiritual imagery. His poetry reveals a crisis that is not only external but internal as well—the crisis of modern civilization. Modern man is afflicted with a divided identity, a lost faith and a weak bond with life. Eliot's poetry thus continues to be one of the most important statements of modernism and fracturing of human identity (Bradbury and McFarlane 28).

Study of Major Poems

T. S. Eliot's significant poems all depict the discontinuity of the modern human personality in various ways. Regarding the poetics of his works, one may conclude that modern man is incomplete, unconfident and weak in the spirit. He is nervous, doubtful, lonely, morally weak and disconnected from society, faith and his own self. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, The Waste Land, The Hollow Men and Ash-Wednesday are Eliot's major poems which contain a great deal of concern for the crisis of modern civilization and the broken identity of the modern man.

1. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is an important early modernist poem by T. S. Eliot. The "modern man" of this poem is "Prufrock," the educated, civilized, but inside-weak, nervous and confused man. He wants to be able to talk, love and do things with his confidence. His nature is a mixture of lust and terror. He's very self-aware and always afraid of what people will say. That is why his identity is divided, his mind is one thing and his body is another. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Eliot says:

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

These lines clearly show Prufrock's hesitation and psychological weakness. The repeated question "Do I dare?" reveals his fear of action. He cannot make decisions confidently because his mind is full of doubt. This hesitation is not only personal weakness; it is the condition of modern man. Eliot presents Prufrock as a fragmented self who is unable to communicate, unable to love and unable to act. His identity is broken by fear, inferiority complex and excessive self-consciousness.

2. *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land is Eliot's most powerful poem on the spiritual death of modern civilization. The poem presents a world where faith, morality, emotional connection and cultural unity have collapsed. Its structure is also fragmented because it contains different voices, sudden shifts, broken scenes, different languages and many mythological and literary references. This broken form reflects the broken condition of modern society. Eliot shows that modern people are emotionally, morally and spiritually disconnected from one another. T. S. Eliot writes in *The Waste Land*:

**Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess,
For you know only
A heap of broken images.**

These lines are very important for understanding the theme of fragmentation. The phrase "a heap of broken images" suggests that modern life has lost unity, order and meaning. Modern civilization is no longer complete or spiritually alive; it is made up of broken values, broken memories and broken identities. Eliot uses this image to show that modern man cannot understand life as a whole. He lives among fragments and therefore his own identity also becomes fragmented.

3. *The Hollow Men*

The Hollow Men presents modern people as spiritually empty and morally weak. The hollow men are not dead in the physical sense, but they are dead from within. They do not have strong faith, courage, purpose or complete identity. They represent those modern individuals who live without inner strength and spiritual direction. Through this poem, Eliot shows the weakness and incompleteness of modern existence. T. S. Eliot writes in *The Hollow Men*:

**We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw.**

These lines directly present modern man as hollow and empty. The word "hollow" suggests inner emptiness, while "headpiece filled with straw" suggests intellectual and spiritual weakness. These people appear human from outside, but they lack depth, faith and moral strength from inside. Eliot uses the hollow men as a symbol of fragmented modern identity. They are unable to act meaningfully, believe firmly or live with a complete sense of self.

4. *Ash-Wednesday*

Ash-Wednesday belongs to Eliot's later spiritual phase. In this poem, Eliot presents a movement from spiritual confusion toward faith and redemption. The speaker is still divided and uncertain, but he begins to search for spiritual peace. Unlike *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, this poem does not remain only in emptiness. It shows that fragmented identity may move toward healing through faith, prayer and inner transformation. T. S. Eliot writes in *Ash-Wednesday*:

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn

These lines show the speaker's inner conflict and spiritual struggle. The repetition of "I do not hope" reflects uncertainty, renunciation and emotional tiredness. However, this hopelessness also becomes the starting point of spiritual search. The speaker wants to move away from worldly desire and toward faith. In this poem, Eliot suggests that modern man's fragmented identity can find direction through spiritual discipline and redemption. Thus, these four poems together show Eliot's deep understanding of modern human identity. *Prufrock* presents nervousness and hesitation; *The Waste Land* presents spiritual death and cultural fragmentation; *The Hollow Men* presents emptiness and incompleteness; and *Ash-Wednesday* presents spiritual search and possible redemption. Through these poems, Eliot proves himself as a major modernist poet who presents modern man as broken, lonely, confused and spiritually searching.

Language, Symbols and Style in Eliot's Poetry

The themes are highly modernist, and so is the language, symbols and style of T. S. Eliot's poetry. His poetry does not follow the simple, smooth and decorative language of traditional poetry. Eliot's language is complex, fragmented and evocative, and his description of the "troubled state of modern life. Language is the reflection of modern consciousness in his poems. Eliot's poetic language is also disjointed, indirect and charged with tension because modern man is confused and divided, spiritually empty. His style is not only for the sake of beauty, it is to bring to light the psychological and spiritual crisis of the modern age.

- **Fragmented Language**

Eliot's poetry may be very disjointed. It does not go in a direct and straightforward manner. His poems have broken sentences, abrupt shifts in tone, voices, incomplete expressions, and abrupt shifts from one image to another. This is a broken language, and a broken man. In a stable world, language is clear and consistent, but in Eliot's modern world, human experience is fractured. Thus, the language is broken too. Eliot adopts various voices, different circumstances and different cultural references in *The Waste Land*. There is no one speaker in a poem. It includes numerous voices that intrude and retreat abruptly. This is an example of the chaos in modern civilization. People are unable to communicate properly, due to the disorder in their inner life. Eliot's broken sentences depict the inability of communication in the modern world (Nicholls 7).

- **Symbolic Language**

One of Eliot's most striking elements of poetry is symbolism. Eliot doesn't make all the things clear directly. Instead, he employs symbols to imply more meaningful things. His symbols are frequently related to dryness, darkness, fog, dust, shadow, water, desert, ruins and hollow figures. These symbols symbolize the spiritual state of contemporary man. For instance in *The Waste Land* dry land is a symbol of spiritual desolation. It depicts a society that has lost its belief, fertility, love and emotionality. Water represents renewal and spiritual rebirth, and when it is not present, it reflects the emptiness of life today. In *The Hollow Men*, likewise, the hollow

refers to the empty hearts of people in the modern world. They exist and exist outwardly but they lack inner strength, faith and moral wholeness. Eliot's symbols are significant because they link physical images to psychological and spiritual images. A Dry Land is not just a place, it is an image of a dry soul. The hollow man is a weak man, and the symbol of modern humanity (Leavis 82).

- **Use of Broken Images**

In Eliot's poetry, there are many broken images. These images are not complete, peaceful or harmonious. These are disjointed, confusing and incomplete. This form of approach is similar to the contemporary concept of fragmentation in modernism. Eliot uses the broken images to illustrate a loss of unity and meaning in modern civilization. T. S. Eliot says in *The Waste Land*:

“A heap of broken images”

There is a short word that is crucial to Eliot's poetic style: It thus implies that life in the present age is composed of broken bits. Old beliefs, values, traditions and relationships have disintegrated. It is impossible for modern man to view life as a whole. He sees only pieces of memory, culture, faith and desire. Thus, in Eliot's poems broken images are the images of broken human identity.

- **Use of Allusions**

Another point of Eliot's style is the use of allusion. An allusion is a reference to something else, such as a literary or religious work, a historical or mythological work. Eliot's poetry abounds with references. He mentions the Bible, Hindu scripture, Greek mythology, classical literature, Dante, Shakespeare and many more. The poems are intellectually deep and culturally wide with these allusions. The meaning of Eliot's allusions is not just to demonstrate learning. He employs them to make a contrast between the present and the past. The old looks rich and meaningful in the spiritual realm and meaningful in the cultural realm; the new looks empty and fragmented in both realms. The use of allusions makes it clear that modern civilization has lost touch with its cultural and spiritual heritage. This separation leads to crisis of identity. Eliot is a collage of myths, religions and literary traditions in *The Waste Land*. This way the poem has a universal quality. The crisis of modern man is not presented as a small-scale personal issue, but turns into a crisis of civilization (Smith 64).

- **Mythical Style**

Myth is also an important part of Eliot's style. His myth-making is employed to shape and organize the chaos of contemporary living. This approach is sometimes referred to as the mythical method. Modern life is juxtaposed against ancient myth and religion, illustrating the emptiness of the present age. In *The Waste Land*, myth is employed to demonstrate the differences between fertility and barrenness, life and death, faith and spiritual emptiness. Old myths frequently contain the ideas of renewal, sacrifice and rebirth. The modern world in Eliot's poetry, however, is not so spiritual. Myth then becomes the criteria for judging contemporary civilization. It demonstrates the corruption of modern man from a meaningful spiritual order (Kenner 66).

- **Impersonal Style**

Eliot felt that poetry was not something which could be simply a reflection of one's own feeling. He sometimes writes in an impersonal manner in his poetry. This means that he does not simply confess his own feelings. Instead, he uses characters, images, situations and symbols as his expression of emotion. The poet stays behind the poem, the poem makes an emotional effect. The impersonal style is crucial in Eliot's modernist poetry. Eliot does not actually affirm that modern man is weak and hesitant, in Prufrock. He creates the character of Prufrock to demonstrate that. In *The Hollow Men* he doesn't explicitly describe spiritual emptiness. He shows the empty, in order to evoke emptiness to the reader. This gives Eliot's poetry a dramatic, symbolic, highly rational form (Brooks 138).

- **Multiple Voices and Shifting Scenes**

Eliot's poems are frequently polyphonic and multivocal. This is particularly evident in *The Waste Land*. The poem moves from one speaker to another and from one place to another. There is no fixed voice. This technique is a symptom of the broken nature of today's society. Modern identity is not presented as unified; it is made up of many broken experiences. Failure of communication is also indicated by more than one voice. The people speak but there is no harmony in the voices. They are still segregated from each other. One of the key elements of the modernist poetry. Here Eliot employs the technique to reveal the emotional and cultural chaos of the modern world.

- **Tone and Mood**

The tone of Eliot's poetry is often serious, ironic, doubtful and melancholic. The mood in his poems is of loneliness, fear, spiritual dryness and uncertainty. Eliot employs irony throughout to reveal the hollowness of modern civilization, at many locations. The modern world looks civilized from the outside, but from the inside it is weak and empty of spirit. With *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the mood is uncertain and self-conscious. The tone of *The Waste Land* is dark, broken and sad. The tone of *The Hollow Men* is empty and hopeless. The mood is now more spiritual and prayerful in *Ash-Wednesday*. This shift of tone illustrates Eliot's journey from modern despair toward spiritual quest (Brooker and Bentley 27).

- **Style as Expression of Fragmented Identity**

Eliot's style is directly connected with the theme of fragmented human identity. His ambiguous language, symbols, allusions, alternation of voices and intricate structure are not simple ornamentation. They express the broken condition of modern man. The style of Eliot's poetry mirrors the subject matter of his poetry. Since modern life is fragmented, Eliot's poetic style is also fragmented. So language, symbols and style in Eliot's poetry complement each other to present the crisis of modern human identity. His language is confused, his symbols are spiritually empty, his allusions are lost and his broken style is the divided consciousness of the modern man. Hence Eliot's poetry is a potent reminder of the outer crisis of civilization and the inner crisis of the human soul (Southam 96).

Conclusion

One of the strongest expressions of modernism and disintegration of human identity is the poetry of T. S. Eliot. His poems offer a vision of the world where everything is uncertain, where



there is no spiritual content, no emotional connection and no sense of culture. The era of modernism with the advent of war, industrialisation, urbanisation, and loss of traditional consciousness, brought about a profound crisis in human consciousness. Eliot knew this crisis was not just social or historical but was also an inner crisis of identity. Modern man is incomplete, unconfident and unspiritual in his poetry. He is torn in two, alienated from society, alienated from faith, tradition and morals. Eliot portrays the modern man as a nervous, hesitant and self-conscious person in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Prufrock is a person desiring to act and communicate, but who is not able to do so due to his fear and insecurity. His indecision, repeated, reveals the psychological disintegration of contemporary man. He lives in a world of social manners and empty routine, in his heart there are loneliness and lack of confidence. Eliot's aim in Prufrock is to demonstrate that the crisis of modern identity is already present in the mind itself.

In *The Waste Land* Eliot brings this individual crisis into the realm of the civilizational crisis. The poem is a description of a morally empty world in which human interaction has become robotic, devoid of emotion and value. It is disorderly, with many voices, multi-faceted imagery and mythological elements, a disorder intrinsic to modern civilization. A heap of broken images is an emblem of the modern world in which values, beliefs and identities are no longer united. Fragmentation is evident in the structure of the poem itself, indicating that the present day life style can no longer be presented in simple and traditional poetic form. *The Hollow Men* is Eliot's exploration of the emptiness of the modern world. The hollow men are living but they do not have a soul. They don't have faith, courage or a sense of purpose and inner strength. They are representative of the contemporary human being who can't be part of an action and who can't live morally. Their lack of content is a sign of the confusion and incompleteness of modern identity. The spiritual emptiness of modern man comes across sharply through Eliot's use of the image of hollow figures.

But there is a hope for Eliot's poetry beyond *Ash-Wednesday*. This poem is a journey from doubt to godliness, from discipline to redemption. The speaker remains divided and unsure but starts to look for spiritual meaning. Through this, Eliot asserts the possibility that broken identity can heal through faith and internal change. The poem is a change from the modern emptiness to spiritual possibility. Language, symbols and style are at the very heart of Eliot's modernist vision. His disjointed language and fractured images, his allusions and mythical approach and his multiple voices are not just technical games. They are symbols of the disintegration of contemporary life. Eliot's form and his theme complement each other: The dismembered style of his poetry is a symptom of dismayed modern man. So, Eliot's poems are poetry studies of a new human identity. Thus, it may be said that T. S. Eliot is a major modernist poet because he is the one who is to give artistic form to the crisis of the modern age. In his poetry he shows the isolation, the fear, the spiritual emptiness and the dual consciousness of modern man. Eliot demonstrates that modern identity is fractured by doubt, disaffection, the absence of belief, cultural isolation, in *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Ash-Wednesday*. His poetry continues to be relevant in that it is not just the tragedy of a single person, but the spiritual and psychological crisis of an entire civilization.



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