

## Delineation of Love and the Overwhelming Questions of J. Alfred Prufrock in T S Eliot's Poem "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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### Abstract:

Modern poetry is marked with the spirit of revolt against humanism and romanticism. The note of pessimism is always discernible in modern poetry that expresses a feeling of frustration among the people. T S Eliot is a modern poet not merely because of the novelty of his themes and by awareness of his time but chiefly because of the new method evolved by him for poetic communication. His poem "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is an excellent example of modern poetry that deals with the complexities and dilemma of modern man. The present paper attempts to deal with the description of love of J Alfred Prufrock and his problems while expressing his feelings to his lady love. The paper tries to make an in-depth study of the situation faced by the protagonist who is in quest of a successful love relationship.

Keywords: Modern poetry, Romanticism, Pessimism, Love, Dilemma

The modern literary movement came into existence during the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The movement flourished with the exclusion of any previously acknowledged theory and ideas in regard to literature and other fields. New experiments such as expressionism, experimentalism, realism was widely carried out during this period. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was published in the volume *Prufrock and Other*

Observations in 1917 by T S Eliot. It contains mainly T S Eliot's revolt against Georgian poetry and the thought of Prufrock illustrate the nature of Eliot's new poetry.

In the poem *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, T S Eliot tries to focus on the barrenness, sterility, fragmentation, alienation, boredom and indecisiveness of modern man. However, it also expresses the problem of modern world in terms of values, ethics, social and psychological problems. T S Eliot is a modern poet who is unique in his style and technique of poetic expression. The motive of the poem is expressed through the character of Prufrock who loves a young lady and who will not lay bare his heart if he is not sure about the lady's response to his proposal. The quotations from Dante as an epigraph of the poem make it clear and evident that creates the atmosphere in the very beginning of the poem. The poem, in fact, reflects the vagueness and complexities of modern life. T s Eliot has used the poem as a medium that reflects the entire problems of modern man.

The modern society and its complexities are beautifully highlighted by T s Eliot in the poem through the character of Prufrock. Eliot is also seen representing the complexities of modern civilization in language. T S Eliot is preoccupied with extreme examples of abnormal types and his poems display the feelings of disgust at the existing civilization he tries to portray this in his poems. He has been considered a one of the major poets of the Modern Age owing to his use of imagery, poetic power, and thought-provoking ideas.

Love is not divine for Prufrock and he feels that it is highly mundane and sexual. He finds himself unable to express his wish and to give a direct expression to his beloved. In one pale evening he walks through a half-deserted street with the hope to meet his beloved. He finds that the street is lying like a boring argument and when he comes to the overwhelming question, he falters and speaks to himself:

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo

Prufrock is found in the situation of self-pity and self-disgust in the room and he referred to the images of tortuous street and fog cat. He makes the comment that he has measured his life with coffee spoon and finds himself unable to express his feeling. He thought that he will rethink about the task as he has enough time in hand before taking the risk of being ridiculous:

There will be time, there will be time  
There will be time to murder and create  
Time yet for hundred indecisions  
And for a hundred visions and revisions.

In such a moment of dilemma, Prufrock thinks about the prince Hamlet and says that he is not prince Hamlet but his attendant only:

No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do.

The reference to various characters and his affinity with them expresses the terror and failure of social responsibility in Prufrock's mind. He thinks that if he expresses his feeling he will be formulated and all eyes will be fixed on him. He will be pinned wriggling on the wall. He wants to be a pair of ragged claws to scuttle across the difficulties of the silent seas and the pangs of subconscious mind. He was seen passing the time by taking tea and snacks instead of facing the crisis of the moment. He is digging himself from the moment and becomes busy in the thought of decisions and revisions. Once again, he is found lost in the thought of contradiction and repulsion. He thinks that he will walk upon the beach in search of good health. He remembers about sea and its dark depth. He thinks about his mysterious recess of mind and sees mermaids singing one another. He stays there with his thought of love with sea-girls wreathed with sea-weeds, red and brown. But when they come to the conscious world, their sub-conscious selves drown.

The poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” emphasizes on the exciting feature of modern life and new technologies. At the same time, it is also to be admitted that modern life comes with the persistent sense of estrangement and separation from others. It is through the character of Prufrock that the poem highlights upon modern condition that comes essentially from the feeling of alienation from the physical world. A lot of new technologies evolved in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century are being mentioned in the poem by T S Eliot. For instance, the poem refers to several technologies such as lamplight, factories and anesthesia etc. The evolving new techniques and technologies have created an inferior complexity in the mind of the protagonist of the poem and he finds it very difficult to live in conformity with the same. Prufrock has expressed how the yellow fog slithers through the tedious street. He also mentions about the cat that rubs its back upon the window pane. Instead of interacting with the people and more importantly with his lady love, he is seen looking and observing some unnecessary objects that deviates him from his intended purpose.

In fact, Prufrock is not been able to take any decisions and he is a man who like to be in the state if indecisions and indefinite revisions. The poem beautifully expresses his digressions of mind that restricts the momentum of the action. The dilemma of Prufrock creates problems from him and in spite of his utter feeling of love he is not been able to express it. The poem indicates that excessive preoccupation with something may lead to complete disaster signifying nothing. The problem of Prufrock suggests that it may be absolutely because of his inferior complexity which follows him like a shadow. It has become an identity of Prufrock to think much and it seems to be rooted in social anxiety and fear. He has always the fear of making wrong decisions and keeps on thinking even on some natural or basic human activities such as how to dress, how to eat, hoe to walk, how to talk etc. in the process of his thinking too much he frequently misses the right time and fins himself in a miserable state of life.

The main purpose of Prufrock was to make the proposal to his lady love. Accordingly, he visited the place and finds his beloved present there. But unfortunately, he cannot propose her and according to him it is very difficult task. He says that it is even difficult than killing someone. He thinks that he needs some more time to think over the matter. He feels inferior in front of his lady love. Prufrock can be studied as a character in the modern psychological context. Prufrock addresses to his inner self and excuses himself. His love song is the song of a being divided between passion and timidity. It is song that is never sung in the real world. The poem develops the theme of frustration of emotional conflict, dramatized by the inner self and Prufrock himself.

In the beginning of the poem Prufrock finds himself split into two selves- his romantic self and his real self. He is encouraged by the romantic self to go and make the proposal to his beloved. But at the same time his real state of mind restricts him and asks for rethinking about the matter. It also reminds him that he has no courage to propose to her. Prufrock's romantic self suggests that both of them should proceed to meet the lady in that evening. The evening is also described as a patient lying motionless etherized upon an operating table. The inner state of mind of Prufrock is beautifully expressed through the description of the street as well as the evening. Prufrock says that he and his inner self has arrived in the room on time in that evening when the atmosphere is quiet.

Let us go then, you and I

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table

But in reality, there is no expression of love proposal made by Prufrock. He does not have the courage to meet the lady face to face and express his love to her. It is in fact an irony that though the title of the poem is love song of J. Alfred Prufrock but it is nothing of that kind. There is a note of pessimism and disillusionment in modern poetry. Prufrock is an

extremely pessimistic man who is self-conscious of his inferiority and his disability to speak. He thinks that he cannot be compared with Shakespeare's Hamlet because even Hamlet acts at the end of the tragedy.

The place of T S Eliot is mainly secured on the basis that he has evolved a new poetic technique. His extra ordinary sensitiveness to modern conditions and a rare power of analysis have made his poetry new and revolutionary. According to him the nature of poetry should be complex and represent complexities of our civilization with its great variety. His poetic technique is best reflected in the *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Eliot has used repetition, figurative language, fragmented sentences, allusions and bizarre choices in language to express anguish in cities and isolation of individuals in the present society. The meaninglessness as well as the futility of life also find expression in this poem through the character of Prufrock. The poem focuses on the basic problem of J. Alfred Prufrock and his insistent endeavor to overcome this difficulty in his life. Though the love of Prufrock remains unexpressed throughout the poem yet he can be studied in the light of the problem faced by almost all modern man in the present context of time. The poem bears modernist ideas that are being expressed by T S Eliot in this poem by using various literary and poetic technique. It is an example of dramatic monologue where one person speaks from the beginning to the end that reveals the personality of the speaker i.e., Prufrock who is unable to establish a satisfying love-relationship.

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