

Q. A Critique of Theory of Eliot's Dissociation of Sensibility.

Ans: Eliot's theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' may be said to be an attempt to find some kind of historical explanation to the dissolution of the tradition of unified sensibility which found its perfection in the writings of Dante and Shakespeare. The unified sensibility was a sensibility which was the product of a true synthesis of the individual with the traditional, of feeling with thought and of the temporal with the eternal.

Although the theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' cannot claim to be an original concept, its importance is beyond question, and its influence has been abiding for it was Eliot who for the first time found a convincing expression and idiom to the widespread belief of a split in the personality not only of the artist but also in modern men and women.

Their doctrine, like all his other critical concepts, has its own limitations and also its proper field of application. Although the theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' is generally applicable to metaphysical poetry, it is not true of all the poems of the metaphysical poets. Mr. Leishman, for example, in *The Monarch of Wit* says that the concept of the 'dissociation of sensibility' cannot be applied to all the poems of John Donne. Eliot himself, as Leishman goes on to explain, discovered 'a fissure of thought and sensibility' in John Donne which means that "in the terminology of 1921, Donne's sensibility was dissociated. Similarly it has been pointed out by a large number of critics that although the doctrine of the 'dissociation of sensibility' can be justified with reference to some of the poems of the metaphysical poets, it has been unduly extended to the Elizabethan dramatists.

By 'sensibility' Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impression. He means much more than that. By 'sensibility' he means a synthetic faculty, a faculty which can amalgamate and unite thought and feeling, which can fuse into a single whole the varied and disparate, often opposite and contradictory experiences, the sensuous and the intellectual.

The second criticism that is commonly levelled against Eliot's appraisal of the metaphysicals is that although the metaphysical poets received high praise from Eliot, in actual practice his creative and critical work has very little of metaphysical quality. In his poems such as *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Four Quartets*, the metaphysical quality of his earlier verse seems to have almost disappeared. Mr. Duncan in *The Revival of Metaphysical Poets* even doubts the metaphysical quality of his earlier verse.

But in spite of all these criticisms, Eliot's theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' is undoubtedly one of his most significant contributions to critical analysis and judgment, for it exerted a tremendous influence over the creative and critical talents of his contemporaries so that the poets became conscious of the traditions of the unified sensibility.

To Sum up, in the words of Frank Kermode, the poets henceforth began, 'to charge their thinking with passion, to restore to poetry a truth independent of the presumptuous intellect.'