

Human Relationships in T.S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party

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Abstract – *The aim of this research paper is provide a descriptive and an analytical study based on human relationships in Eliot's The Cocktail Party. This play is about human relationships within the framework of marriage and outside it. Each person creates illusion about oneself and about others and therefore develops a personality that is not real. He covers his real face behind the mask. In order to achieve success in their relationships, human beings have to strip away the illusions and reveal their true self. They live in a modern society in the midst of many but do not have emotional relationship with anybody. They seek escape from their monotonous and boring life by arranging parties. They have no proper understanding of human relations. Due to failure of natural relations, they live in their private lives and become frustrated and self-deceiving persons. Eliot tries to find solution and creates awareness among characters of their potentialities and requirements.*

Keywords – Human Relationship, Understanding, Illusion, Self- Knowledge and Loneliness

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INTRODUCTION

A lack of understanding and communication is common problem of the present modern society. A person is in conflict with his own personality and reduced himself into a 'living object' with no emotions and feelings. Both Edward and Lavinia are unable to maintain balance and harmony in their relation. The Cocktail Party is a successful drama because it helps the modern man to protect his married life.

Modern human beings keep up social appearances and feel that the other person may think them ridiculous if they tell the truth of their relation. This same thing happens in the play. Both Edward and Lavinia arrange cocktail parties to find happiness, company and human compassion from other people. In this process, they suffer a lot because their mutual misunderstanding becomes the cause of their failure in relationship. They live in an unreal world full of illusions. The Guardian or spiritual guide leads them to their self- realization.

The play opens with a cocktail party and assembled guests in the party involve in their superficial discussion. It is a characteristic of fashionable contemporary society. These people try to fill in the vacuum of their lives by indulging in these kinds of parties and discussions. This depicts hollowness of their relations. Moreover, the hostess of the party Lavinia is not present. This develops an awkward situation. The perplexed husband tries to cancel out

the invitations but fails in his attempt. Edward gives lame excuses for the absence of his wife.

The sudden disappearance of his wife gives him a shock and there starts a process of self-exploration. Edward realizes that he cannot love without Lavinia and his life has no meaning without his wife. Edward reveals everything to the Unidentified Guest. By doing so, he wants to unburden himself from the feeling of guilt and ridiculousness. The Unidentified Guest makes him aware that the sudden disappearance of Lavinia overwhelms him about the loss of his personality. His wife's departure jolts him and he acknowledges that he is estranged from his real self. A sudden jolt leads human being to find out what they really are. Lavinia takes a temporary break by disappearance. Her flight reveals the weak and shallow nature of human beings who live in the wealthy bourgeois society and try to escape from reality.

After the cocktail party is over, Celia returns to express her love to Edward as they are free and can marry because Lavinia has left Edward. But Edward wants his wife back. He realizes about his real personality and recognizes himself as a 'middle aged man':

"Is, that only since this morning

I have met myself as a middle- aged man

Beginning to know what it is to feel old.

That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost

The desire for all that was most desirable," (p. 66)

Celia is shocked by his behaviour and this leads to her self-examination. She faces isolation and failure. As a result, she examines that she has living all the time in an unreal world, a world of dreams and imagination. She becomes aware that she created an image of Edward's personality in her mind and wants that Edward should behave like that projection. In reality, he is a very different sort of person. Edward tells Celia that Peter has also lived in a dream world from which she herself has awakened him. Celia is surprised and assures that there is nothing serious between her and Peter. Celia notices a change in Edward and tells him that:

"I see another person,

I see you as a person whom I never saw before,

The man I saw before, he was only a projection-

I see that now- of something that I wanted-

No, not wanted- something I aspired to-

Something that I desperately wanted to exist.

It must happen somewhere- but what, and where is it?

Edward, I see that I was simply making use of you.

And I ask you to forgive me." (p. 68)

Celia has gained a new insight because nobody can love something created by his/her own imagination. Love creates an illusion among human beings about their relations. Human beings recover with the passage of time and with the growth of their perception. This is how Celia comes to realize the reality of her relationship with Edward.

The Unidentified Guest reminds Edward about his decision but he tells him that he is free to alter his decision. The Unidentified Guest replies him that he can change his mind but he is not free because he has made a choice that sets motion in his life and the lives of others which cannot be reversed.

Lavinia comes back to Edward's life. They both blame each other. Lavinia accuses her husband that she has lost her sense of humour and has always tried her best to strengthen their relationship. In the same manner, Edward accuses that she uses him as a public background and enforces her will on him. When this becomes unbearable he loses his mental balance. He utters that 'Hell is oneself, hell is alone, the other

figures in it merely projections. There is nothing to escape from, And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.' (p. 99)

In this play, characters are married to each other not because they love and need each other, but they feel physically attractive. After that, they wait for 'some wonderful experience' but that moment does not come. Human beings do not love each other but they have grown so used to each other. It seems to them that their individual personalities are shaped and dependent on the other person. They have lost touch with reality and reduced each other to the level of objects.

Celia loves Edward and is loved by Peter. Lavinia is married to Edward. She loves Peter, but is not loved by him in return. Lavinia is doomed to live as an isolated island due to her vanity which forces her to think that no one could love her. Edward thinks that his wife has oppressed and controlled his life and he also feels that he is incapable of loving. Under such circumstances both become each other oppressors. The characters are indecisive to the point of professional help and trapped in social environment. The other people do not bring comfort and companionship to their life.

Sir Henry Reilly exposes the horror of loneliness and meaninglessness of their life. He shatters their illusions and projects before them the true image of reality. He traces the cause of their alienation and reveals their secret relationship with Celia and Peter. He calls them 'exceptionally well- suited to each other'. They have in common 'isolation' and absence of self- knowledge. He points out their sense of inadequacy on both sides and advises them to 'make the best of a bad job'. He suggests them that their condition is curable but the form of treatment is in their hands. He gives them two options- one is to reconcile to human life and other is to follow the path of spiritual salvation. The first path demands to make the best of a bad job and second path requires the courage and faith to follow the unknown and untrodden road. The couple is made to realize their mistakes and to reconcile to live together again. Dr. Reilly says those who choose the common life must:

"Maintain themselves by the common routine,

Learn to avoid excessive expectation,

Become tolerant of themselves and others,

Giving and taking, in the usual actions

What there is to give and take." (p. 139)

Celia's disillusionment does not merely arise from her losing Edward but from her awareness about the human relations in general people think they love and need each other. At some point of time they

realize their feeling of loneliness and it makes their life intolerable. They seek a way to cope with their problems. Celia also consults the psychiatrist. She does not blame outside world for her situation. Rather, she thinks that there may be something wrong in her. She becomes aware of his solitude and feels a sense of sin. She is also given a choice.

Eliot blends two worlds, spiritual and mundane. Edward and Lavinia choose normal human life but Celia chooses something higher, something that is not worldly but spiritual. This makes difference in her choice and life. Celia's death enables Edward, Lavinia and Peter to understand themselves and their relation with the outer world.

CONCLUSION

Failure of communication and human understanding separate human beings from each other and their conjugal relation is in danger. They search their happiness from other people rather than in each other's company. This leads to the loss of identity and they face identity crisis. Characters in this play are given new directions to their lives by spiritual guardians such as Henry Reilly and his companions Julia and Alex. This play reveals a great deal about the chaos that underlines in the relationships and also tries to find solutions to the troubled human relationships.

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