

Ebb of an 'Ape' in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*

Supriya Sharma
Assistant Professor, Lovely Professional University, Punjab

Abstract - Modernism is a philosophical movement started in the 19th century, took its origin from World War I. Post this war, immense development in industry and technology has been observed. New and deadly ammunitions for the combats have been invented in this period. But in literary terms, its meaning is different. In literature, modernism is the modification of traditional ideas, ways, thoughts and beliefs which are ill-fitted to the modern economic society. Poets and writers found their new horizons to explore. They have started to focus on the individuality. Common man became the prime concern for them. They have started to observe the effect of modernism on the man's life. From this, many negative aspects of modernism came into light. To understand these, Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* became a masterpiece. O'Neill is the only American dramatist to achieve Nobel Prize for literature.

The Hairy Ape is the story of a coal stoker named as Yank who works on a ship. He consider himself belongs to the ship. But his encounter with daughter of an elite class businessman of steel, Mildred Douglas shattered him totally. When Mildred first saw Yank, she gets fainted. She calls him "A Filthy Beast." These words tormented the psyche of Yank and from this; story of the play gets matured. Now, he came to know that he does not belong to the ship. Other workers of the ship miss their families and homes but Yank considers ship his home. But now, he is like a homeless person. He does not belong to the ship. It means he does not have any identity and he does not exist in the society. This play is about the search of his existence in this industrial society. He goes to "Fifth Avenue," where he wants to kill Mildred but fights with other rich people and thrown into the prison. At last, he went to a zoo and saw a gorilla there. He identifies his reflection in that gorilla and calls him his "brother." But when he enters into the cage and embrace him; gorilla crushed Yank into his arms until his last breath.

So, this play is based on the Yank's lost faith and belief in himself. He is the victim of lost identity. He considers himself lonely and alone and finds this rich industrial society is not suitable for him. At the end, he fails to prove his belongingness to the ship where he lived most of his life. It is not the story of only Yank but a story of every labor or working class man who lost his identity and even relationship are not able to provide him the satisfaction. This study will help to understand the problems of a common man who is under the influence of industrial and technological development.

According to the playwright Eugene O'Neill, social discrimination is the major issue in the American society by American capitalist. With the introduction of machines due to industrialization, men work inhumanely which deteriorates their identity. In the play, protagonist "Yank" tried to find out his identity but failed to do so and at last he dies. After this study, the problems of labor class will come into light. Readers will be able to understand how the behavior of elite or business class affects the mind of the workers and could make an idea about the result of this attitude.

In spite of putting all the sincere efforts there could be some limitations which cannot be ignored. This text is particularly focused on the American society. It is only applicable to those societies which are under the influence of modernism or American powers.

The Hairy Ape is among one of the most celebrated play by Eugene O'Neill in American literature. It provides many illustrations of real life. This is the reason that O'Neill's this play will give some ideas about the problems of working class men. This study will give answer of a single question primarily that under the influence of modernism, a man loses his identity and existence from the society. To gain his position in the society, he started a combat with himself and business class. But he gets failed in his attempt. In the real scenario, many working class men are facing this problem. So, this study will try to highlight the issues of laborers who bear the stroke of modernism. Not only highlight but will give some solutions to maintain their identity and belief in themselves.

References

- AlTaher, Bassmah. “A Modern Tragic Hero in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*”. Arab World English Journal, Vol. Special Issue, No. 4, 2016, pp. 224-231.
- Cardullo, Robert. Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*: Text and Context. Lambert Academic Publishing, 2008.
- Mahuvakar, Harish. “The Search for Belonging in Eugene O’Neill’s play *The Hairy Ape*.” International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews, Vol. 2, Issue 4, 2015, pp. 68-71.

