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**THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN (TO JS/07/M/378
THIS MARBLE MONUMENT IS ERECTED BY THE STATE)**

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Abstract:

The Unknown Citizen by W.H. Auden is a satiric poem. It describes an average citizen in a government-controlled state. In many big cities, there is a monument to the Unknown Soldier that stands for the thousands of unknown soldiers who die for their country. The title of Auden's poem parodies this.

The citizen to whom the monument has been built has been found to be without any fault. He was a saint not because he searched for God but because he served the government perfectly. He did not get dismissed from his job. He was a member of the Union and paid all his dues to the union. A report on the Union shows that it was a balance union and did not take extreme views on anything. The social psychology workers found that he was popular among his fellow workers and had a drink with them now and then. He also bought a newspaper every day. He reached to the advertisements normally.

KEYWORDS:

The Unknown Citizen, W.H. Auden, The Citizen, The State, The Marble Monument

INTRODUCTION:

'The Unknown Citizen' is a typical Auden's poem in that it shows the poet's profound concern for the modern world and its problems. A keen intelligent observer of the contemporary scene, Auden was one of the first to realize that the totalitarian socialist state would be no Utopia and that man there would be reduced to the position of a cog in the wheel. A citizen will have no scope to develop his initiative or to assert his individuality. He will be made to conform to the State in all things. It is the picture of such a citizen, in a way similar to Eliot's Hollow Man, which is ironically presented in the poem. Auden dramatizes his theme by showing the glaring disparity between the complete statistical information about the citizen compiled by the State and the sad inadequacy of the judgments made about him. The poet seems to say, statistics cannot sum up an individual and physical facts are inadequate to evaluate human happiness- for man does not live by bread alone.

In the phrase 'The Unknown' the word 'unknown' means ordinary, obscure. So the whole phrase means 'those ordinary, obscure soldiers as citizens of the state who laid down their lives for defending their motherland wanted name and fame, but remained unknown. The title of Auden's poem parodies this. Thus 'The Unknown Citizen' means the ordinary average citizen in the modern industrialized urban society. He has no individuality and identity. He has no desire for self-assertion. He likes to remain unknown.

Poem

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

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One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name proved that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace, when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

- Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973)

CRITICAL APPRECIATION:

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973) is a major poet of the twentieth century. He was born in York on 21 February, 1907 in a middle-class family. His father was a Medical officer and mother had been a nurse, who was a devout Anglo-Catholic. In him we find a combination of the scientific and rational attitude he inherited from his father, and the humanitarian and religious learning he imbibed from his mother. His clinical approach to the problems of human life owes greatly to the direct impact of his father. He conceived the poet as a detached, clinical analyst of men and society, diagnosing individual or social ills, and applying poetry to them as a sort of psychological therapy. He wrote poems with this aim. We find that quite like a doctor he diagnoses the symptoms of a diseased individual as well as of disintegrating civilization and prescribes a remedy.

W. H. Auden, a major poet of modern period, is typically modern in his choice of subject, technique and articulation. Like T. S. Eliot, he represents the dreadful picture of a modern world in his poetry. Using the desolate and rocky background of Post-War Europe of 1930s, he delineates the rise of dictatorship, the exploitation of the common man, economic disparity, spiritual bankruptcy, anxiety and boredom of modern life. Thus, his real subject for poetry is man and his day-to-day activity, and nature is merely cinematic setting for that activity. He has given voice to what is the predominant view of "modern man" held by intellectuals today. Auden is well-known for his rational and non-sentimental interest in representative specimens of modern urban life. His men often stand amidst the bleak atmosphere of modern society. He seems to criticize in his poems everything that creates difficulties for the free expression of the creative spirit in human beings. He is a master of satire and irony and satirizes some of the wrong ideas of good behaviour fostered by our social life. He is particularly effective in ironic descriptions and understatements which are characteristic of Auden.

The poem 'The Unknown Citizen' is a good example of what is said above. It is the story of the modern man who finds himself nowhere and leads a life of anonymity. The ironic title attacks the very snobbery of our social identity mischievously polarized by economic, commercial and ideological pressure groups. The entire poem and its language looks like a compilation of detailed facts about the common man written in the flat matter of fact tone of a report. 'The Unknown Citizen' is known by his number, and not by

his name. He was the ideal citizen from the point of view of the state. The Bureau of Statistics found no official complaint against him. He was a saint 'in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word' according to all the reports on his conduct. He was a saint, because he served the Greater Community that stands for the state. Here one can't help remembering the words of George Orwell in 'Animal Farm' that 'Some animals are equal, but some are more equal'. Similarly, the state is the 'Greater' community. He worked in 'Fudge Motors Inc.' He was an ideal worker too. He satisfied his employers. So, he never got fired. Neither he was a scab nor odd in his views. Therefore, he joined a trade Union and also paid his subscription fee. Social Psychology workers, too, did not find him odd. They found that he was popular with his colleagues and liked a drink. The Press was convinced that he bought a paper every day. His reactions to advertisements also were normal in every way. Like others of his generation, he too was influenced by the advertisements. He bought insurance policies. He was fully insured. His Health-card showed that he was once hospitalized. However, he got cured soon. In this also, he was like other common people. Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declared that he was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan. Therefore, he bought on installment basis a phonograph, a radio, a car and a refrigerator, in fact, everything that the Modern man must have. He held opinions proper for that time. He was always with the time and never against it. He was for the peace, when there was peace, and he went to war-front when there was a war. Like other common people of his times, he was married and added five children to the population, which was the right number for a parent of his generation according to Eugenist. The teachers too had a good report about him. He never interfered with their education. He never asked them any question. He accepted submissively everything that was taught to him. Therefore, he was a good student in the eyes of the teachers. Then, the poet asks two questions. He asks whether this so called ideal citizen was free. Was he happy? The poet himself further says that these questions are absurd. It is stupid to ask such questions, because he must be free and happy. Otherwise, we should certainly have heard, if there was anything wrong with the citizen.

Wystan Hugh Auden was a major poet of the twentieth century. He wrote poems about contemporary life. He uses images taken from technology, industry and urban life. He has given voice to what is the predominant view of 'modern man' held by intellectuals today. 'Modern man' is disillusioned. Auden is well-known for his rational and non-sentimental interest in representative specimens of modern urban life. He seems to criticize in his poems everything that creates difficulties for the free expression of the creative spirit in human beings. He is a master of satire and irony and satirizes some of the wrong ideas of good behavior fostered by our society. Irony is the means he uses to underline what is wrong in our social life. He is particularly effective in ironic descriptions and understatements which are characteristic of Auden. Whatever he says, he says it in an interesting or entertaining manner.

The Unknown Citizen is nobody. He has no individuality. That is why he is 'unknown citizen'-he is anybody. He is not a free human being. He is submissive, meek, passive. He accepts everything meekly. It has become a habit with him. He never asserts himself. He always swims along the stream, and never against it. He takes the trodden path. He is with the world. However, the great people swim against the stream. They think different thoughts. They have the courage to go against the popular common opinion. The qualities of the Unknown Citizen are quite opposite of that of great people. He is more concerned about what others think of him. He doesn't want any trouble in his life. He is the product of his times. He can not even think of changing the status quo. He does not listen to his heart, but brain. He is a practical person, but is free in no way. He confirms to the norms and rules of the society and the state. So, how can one expect him to be happy? He is more a machine than a human being. It reminds one of Eugene O'Neil's well-known play 'Hairy Ape', in which the protagonist's tragedy begins the moment he loses the sense of belongingness after he was fired out. Like this protagonist, it is the need of the unknown citizen to belong to something. Perhaps this is the reason why he confirms to all the norms of the society of his times. Whatever may be the compelling force, it can not be denied that he is no more a free man; he has been robbed of his freedom, which is his birth right given by nature, by the external agencies. This poem attacks the concept of a human being who is not anything more than the product of all the economic, commercial and ideological pressure groups which force him to conform to a standard pattern of life and thought. The unknown citizen is everyman who is controlled by the conventions of bureaucracy and the welfare state which ignore the individual freedom of a citizen. Auden protests against the society which manipulates man by the laws of mass organization, commercial exploitation, social research and spying system. He criticizes the robbing of individual's freedom. This is a satirical poem, in which each line is ironical. It is a satire on the way in which the common man is controlled by the conventions of bureaucracy and the Welfare State which ignore the need for a man to be free and happy. In this poem, Auden shows that poverty and totalitarian regimes are not the only enemies of freedom. Human freedom is restricted in subtle ways in the so-called free capitalist states as well. The average modern man in a mercantile society is ridden heavily by the move of technocratic, bureaucratic and other regimented establishments.

Auden is known for his rational and non-sentimental interest in representing specimens of modern

urban life and 'the Unknown Citizen' is one such specimen. In this poem, Auden makes use of ironic descriptions and understatements which are characteristic of him. The irony underlies everything he says about the unknown citizen. The unknown citizen is 'a saint according to the reports, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word'. Here the phrases 'in the modern sense' and 'an old fashioned word' are important. The poet means the opposite of what he says of the Unknown Citizen. That is why asks two million dollar rhetoric questions: 'Was he free? Was he happy? And the answer is emphatic 'NO'. The poem echoes Rousseau's aphorism: 'Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains'.

Auden uses capital letters in the names of the institutions/things that put fetters in the legs of an individual, that put a hurdle in the way of the freedom of an individual. That make him 'common' man. It would not be out of place to quote Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, former president of India. He says, 'Every individual has an inherent ability to become an extra-ordinary person and give great contribution to the well being of humankind. But (s)he is made ordinary by the society'. This very much applies to the Unknown Citizen. That is why, we can say that the theme of this poem is universal. It will have relevance in all times.

CONCLUSION:

At the end of the poem the poet asks two questions. Was he free? Was he happy? No government statistics can ever answer these kinds of questions. By asking these questions, the poet is drawing our attention to the question of freedom and happiness. And ironically, the poet suggests that the modern man is slaver to routine and he is incapable of understanding such concepts freedom and happiness. Therefore, such a question in this context would be 'absurd'. Thus, this poem 'The Unknown Citizen' is a bitter attack on modern society-its indifference towards individuality and identity. The only way for an individual to survive in a regimented society is to conform, obey and live in perpetual mental slavery. Such a creative is this 'unknown citizen' who is utterly devoid of any urge for self-assertion. Such a modern man is a slave to the routine, is incapable

'The Unknown Citizen' presents an ironic picture of an ideal citizen in a modern urban-industrial society. Auden is the master of satire and irony and satirizes some of the wrong ideas of good behavior fostered by our society. Irony is the means he uses to underline what is wrong in our social life. The ironic descriptions and understatements bring out the theme of the poem effectively. Auden also make the effective use of enjambement.

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