

Societal Issues in Literature
Sense of Individualism and Societal Corruptions Portrayed in
W.H. Auden's *The Unknown Citizen*: A Critical Analysis

H. S. Hari Priya, I M.A. English

Department of English
Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai 625021
Tamilnadu, India
hsharipriya98@gmail.com

Abstract

This research article deals with the themes of sense of Individualism and Societal corruptions through W.H. Auden's most remarkable poem *The Unknown Citizen*. Here the unknown citizen is actually unknown to all who lead a very mechanical life, merely as a robot. The government has an accurate record about every minute details of this unknown citizen, but his own desires, and particular thoughts are neglected and suppressed by the state. The aim of this paper is to critically explores how a common man in a modern society who lost his own Individualism and happiness by the rules and conventions of bureaucratic government and the impacts of modernization.

Keywords: Individualism, The Unknown citizen, Mechanical life, Suppressed, Modernization

The Unknown Citizen is written by an American writer W.H. Auden and it was published in January 6,1940. The Poem *Unknown Citizen* is a bitter satirical attack against the deep impacts of modernization. W.H. Auden vividly focused how a common man becomes a victim of the corrupted modern society. The title work of the Poem is somewhat strange and obscure. The Unknown Citizen is actually unknown to all and he has no name. His individuality is Suppressed by the modern world and the government.

Individualism is the most essential and unique quality of every human being. But according to the author the unknown citizen is almost lost his individuality as well his identity because the Unknown Citizen entered into the world of modernity. He adopted the norms and ideas of modern society. Here, the unknown citizen is similarly compared with T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Man*. In Hollow men T.S. Eliot criticizes the horrible effects of the First World War. The sacrifice of the soldiers in World Wars remain unknown and unnoticed by all. Like an unknown Soldier, the unknown citizen is also completely sacrificed and served his life for the government and the Society. But he lost his individuality and happiness. His presence only signifies a stuff of the modern world.

The effects of modernization is deeply portrayed by W.H. Auden in his *The Unknown Citizen*. According to W.H. Auden people get easily attracted towards modernity. The government also use the common people only for the welfare of the nation. The government as well as the modern society never paid any concern for the real happiness of the common citizens. The state and the modern society gradually transformed the unknown citizen into a robot, because he mechanically does all his duties like a robot. The life of an unknown citizen is dull, hopeless and meaningless. So, his own personal identity is actually lost and unknown.

After the end of the Second World War, the world rapidly goes through into many new changes. The arrival of modern and scientific technologies bring comfort to the people. But their personal freedom and happiness is corrupted. Thus, the lack of happiness and enjoyment among the people made them to lead a very dull and monotonous life in the modern world. Here the Unknown Citizen is also a prey to the modern society.

The government has all the details about this citizen. The Bureau of Statistics tells that the unknown citizen has never committed any mistakes, worked in a factory, he satisfied his employers, and paid his taxes regularly. The Social psychological workers found that he liked to drink occasionally and daily bought a newspaper and normally reacted to the advertisements. Thus, the unknown citizen is perfect in everything and he resembles as a typical so called '*modern saint*'.

W. H. Auden in his *THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN* directly hit against the carefree attitude of bureaucratic government for the common citizens. The government has all the details about the unknown citizen except his freedom and happiness. As a keen Observer of typical American Society, W.H. Auden severely criticized the rule of bureaucratic government and modern society.

The people in the modern world, madly addicted to the modern life. At the end of the poem Auden asks a question "*was he free? was he happy? The question is absurd.*" This question ultimately revealed the pathetic situation of the unknown citizen. In this modern world, though people live a very beautiful and luxurious life, where is their real happiness? The question is unanswerable. Likewise, the unknown citizen also lost his individuality and his own desires, goals and his particular opinions are Suppressed by the government and the modern society.

The Unknown Citizen referred by W.H. Auden is not only denotes a life of a single person it highlights the pathetic lifestyles of all the common citizens in the modern world. The government should respect the feelings of the common people but not to oppress them. But W.H. Auden also abuses the meaningless life of unknown citizens who willingly wants to remain unknown. He never takes any steps to assert his self-individuality.

Every human being in the world has the right to raise their particular opinions and live a happy life. The government and the modern society should not try to crush the common man's Individualism and his happiness.

Work Cited

W.H. Auden 's The Unknown Citizen, Routledge, 1983.