



Traversing Boundaries: An Analysis of the Unremitting Psychic Unity in *The Waste Land*

Sruthi S.

Abstract

Known as 'Pope of Russel Square' in the history of English literature from the 20th century, T. S. Eliot's, literary ingenuity augmented the modernist writings. 'The Waste Land' is one such eventuality that, retrospectively from the publication, permuted worldwide, giving boundless definitions and ceaseless critical appraisals. Contriving the idiom of modern poetry, his career as a part never went over the hill since it was chiselled out of the emotional and intellectual retaliation to a gest which was his life itself. The close-grained, fragmented study of his works, has seemingly been immense and comprehensive. Being portrayed as the literary arbiter, his personal life was lucid and full of drama. The oeuvre hence hollers the zeitgeist of his era. As a philosopher, his happy hunting ground was both religion and the emphasis on conforming to the basic moral values of life. His ethical involvement with life emanates from the underlying desolation and devastation regarding his personal life. When he assiduously carried his position in poetry, politics, and literature, he was tagged as heedless in his personal life. The childhood limitations sprouted out from the complications of inguinal hernia, later when he was at Harvard while studying Sanskrit and Indian philosophy, the commencement of WWI and the escape from Oxford after witnessing a society which was war-torn, a love affair with Emily Hale which closed out in two shakes of a lamb's tail and the hasty entry into wedlock with Vivienne Haigh-Wood whose alleged adultery with Bertrand Russel and her ailment that followed took a toll on his burgeoning literary career.

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Sruthi S.

Research Scholar, Centre for
Advanced Studies and Research in
English Language and Literature,
Department of English, Farook
College (Autonomous), Calicut,
affiliated to Calicut University,
Kerala, India.
e-mail : sruthis1221@gmail.com

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Introduction

The Waste Land, officially published in 1922, is acclaimed for the colossal number of images. Eliot, deeply influenced by the Indian traditions, intertwined them with the former, inoculating the East into the West. For him, the Upanishads and folklore were streaks of light that fell on the dark and disillusioned way of writing. Starting from *The Burial of the Dead*, till *What the Thunder Said*, the poem proceeds with unwitting ease while the reader rather wobbles through a series of events stretching from the legend of the Holy Grail, the Fisher King to the immediate British society. Part five is the denouement, where the cardinal values referred to in Sanskrit, Damyata, Datta, and Dayadhvam from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad are mentioned, seemingly reshuffled by Eliot to 'Datta', 'Dayadhvam', and 'Damyata'; meaning 'Give', 'Sympathise' and 'Restrain'. The shuffling was wilfully implemented, as alluded to by many critics. But for a feeler who, exasperated by the atrocities of war, could not necessarily keep the word restrained to the end and the overscrupulous side of Eliot could not have missed the slightest of the change either.

In Sanskrit, when the three groups; the celestial beings, the human beings, and demons approached the creator Brahma, the latter, comprehensively acknowledged the positions of each group, categorized them as the ones who savour all the palatial conveniences, the ones who practise hoarding out of intense greed and the ones who are callous. He uttered the word 'Da' to each group without elucidation. Then, extrapolating, inferred the meaning, which was to do away with sensuality by restraining, to put an end to greed by giving, and finally to end the utmost savagery and to reinstate sympathy. Eliot, as a juggler, skilfully handles the shift of scenes, effortlessly jumping from the Chapel Perilous to the brim of the Ganges, seeking aid in Buddhism while the Western culture collapses, with the constant quest for 'Shantih' the mythical solace where there will be a slight ray of hope. The work and its relevance are still on with the progress of time. The critical analysis of the work about any prevailing situation will give a considerably good explanation because, culturally, everyone faces similar issues and as someone aptly interpreted, there is nothing such as personal in this world because some way or

the other everyone is surfing a big giant wave, facing the crests and troughs. If not none, humanity is always knit together in the face of destruction and devastation. That is why the emotions that Eliot portrayed outshoot the cultural boundaries and are universal.

Objectives

Since the time of publication of *The Waste Land*, innumerable studies have been conducted, reviews have been jotted down and still, the scope of further interpretations stays on like a ceaseless springhead. The primary objective here is to bring about the cultural and psychic bridging of the West and the East. What the poem implies in the psyche of the people and its laudable universality.

Literature Review

Literature, regardless of whatever the times may be, is always considered as something that promotes the betterment of living, a way of life. According to Stephan Spender, ‘The central theme of *The Waste Land* is the breakdown of civilization, and the conditioning of those who live within it by that breakdown so that every situation is a symptom of the collapse of values’ (106). The interdisciplinary approach to linking literature and psychology is marked to be a pathbreaking turn in the history of literature from all around the world. With the poem being considered as the spiritual autobiography of Eliot, the analysis tends to be of greater interest to the critics. Notably Harold Bloom, in his work says.

“The question that Eliot might, in some form or other, have asked himself—What is ‘mine’ about my poem? is a version of this problem, and it belongs to an important line of nineteenth-century thought” (Bloom 60). The line is important because it was one of the ways the nineteenth century undertook to defend the status of human endeavor against the implications of scientific determinism, and its consequences mattered because the way the question is answered affects the value that is attributed to art.

The essence of the poem was unique and different. It was not restricted to the premises of London. Like the churning power of water, he wanted to take everything in. Historically, it was the experiences of a mind, a single, powerful consciousness, and socially, it was a mirror holding against the contemporary society.

Methodology

The paper has been written purely concentrating on the qualitative aspect, analysing the poem from the theoretical framework, thoroughly examining the poem, analysing various secondary sources, predominantly books and websites.

Analysis

The Waste Land is often compared to a fabric that has been woven from the threads taken from different regions. The emotional thread outshoots the boundaries of cultures. *The Burial of the Dead*, the first section, spells out the beauty of death. The inability or the strain to get out of the death-in-life circumstances in *The Waste Land*. This portion is presented as a reverie with accolades to Ezekiel and Ecclesiastics. 'April is the cruellest month' since it wraps the dead land with snow, unhurriedly allowing people to let slip of the reality or what lies beneath it, that is the stark reality of life (Eliot, *The Waste Land*-01). The trepidation or the fear, growing out of a calamity-stricken society and the perturbation regarding a potentially vague future, with concerns regarding what will be fruiting out of a doomed land, is what is bothering the speaker, or Eliot himself. The devastation caused by two important occurrences, WW1, and the Spanish Flu of 1918-19, were beyond comprehension, more than that Eliot and his wife were also among the ones who were affected by the contagion. The time and scene were not the same, the deaths caused by the war and the illness and the burial of the dead were happening. The title refers to the prayer from the Anglican prayer book and its prayer for the burial of the dead. 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. We all are in the dust in the end.' (Genesis 3.19, King James Version). The sudden shift of the setting and the jumbling happen in the first part itself, suggesting how instantaneously life changes. When the speaker sees a noisy flock of people galloping over the London bridge, whom death spared, he contemplates their existence, extending his doubt about whether they are dead or alive, or are affected by the death of someone dear and moving perforce, like what Dante wrote in his 'Inferno', 'so long a train of folk that, that I could never have believed death had undone so many.' (01-03) The meeting with war veteran Stetson, with whom the speaker fought the ancient Mylae War, goes morbid with him enquiring about the corpse that the former planted. The confrontation between the modern and the ancient aggregates with the realisation that everything remains the same, regardless of the era or time. War and its deadly outcomes remain the same. The last line, attributed to

the French poet, Charles Baudelaire, 'You, hypocrite reader, my likeness, my brother.' (Translated.qtd.in *The Waste Land*, 76). According to the poet, Stetson is everyone; the reader and Eliot himself.

The Game of Chess is about women, mainly about women in the world and their relationship with men and how they get trapped in the repetitive and tedious cycle. With Cleopatra in a chair 'brushed' like a throne, in a heavily embellished room with a curving of Philomel who, according to Greek mythology was raped by her brother-in-law, and to ease her pain, the Gods turned her into a beautiful nightingale with sweet voice. But nothing could cut back the pain endured and she still cries 'Jug Jug' to her tormentor. The conversation between two women in a pub in the East end of London about Lil and her troubled marriage. 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME' (Line 141) to question the marriage, relationships, sexual relations etc, but no one dares. Perhaps, the only way to escape is like Ophelia, in Hamlet, by feeling the dead-cold water; the only possible way to get out. In *The Fire Sermon*, the point of convergence is a deserted Thames where the nymphs or the prostitutes have left after an eventful night, leaving everything cluttered. He juxtaposes the scene with 'Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song' (183) famous lines from Prothalamion by Edmund Spenser, for celebrating an engagement, stressing the beauty and perfection of the bond despite the hard plights in life. Eliot mourns about a land that lost its charm and spiritualism and now is like an empty bottle. The advent of Sweeney to a brothel, the violent misdemeanour by Tereus on his sister-in-law Philomela, the blind seer Tiresias who 'witnesses' the love-making scene, certainly devoid of the element of love, of the typist and a young man. Tiresias, according to Greek mythology, was condemned by the gods to spend seven years as a man and seven years as a woman. The constant desire to experience earthly pleasures often makes the modern man burn like fire. He acknowledges both emotions. Like how fast the shallow waters consume one *The Death by Water* is the shortest of them all. The one-on-one confrontation of death and time, the drowning of Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor from *The Burial of the Dead*, Eliot urges for the resurrection of the sailor and concomitantly yearns for the resurrection of humanity as a whole. The fifth part of the poem exhibits perceptibly the attributions to Indian ethos, What the Thunder Said. The paths of the mountain where Jesus Christ walked in agony and in the garden where he was crucified for the sins of humanity, no traces of water be found, only thunder without rain. Water is the basic element for the survival of humanity; yet even after

the sacrifice, no trace of water can be seen. The land after the war; the destruction of places and people. The motherly crying, cracks, explosions, falling towers, high-pitched sounds— everything seems like a reverie. The hour of twilight where everything is covered with violet light, is the twilight of a civilization, too. But violet is the colour of baptism, too. So, that can be a beginning as well; the baptism of the waste land. Eliot, more than Buddhism, was preoccupied with Christianity to a great extent that he was fascinated by the qualities of spiritual discipline, empathy, charity, etc. Most of these Christian doctrines form the foundation for many of his works. The detachment from the worldly senses and inclination towards spiritual discipline. The fifth part consolidates the same. The journey to the perilous chapel, its collapsed grave, a lifeless chapel without windows, everything demonstrates the hopelessness sprouting out of the lack of spirituality. But the lightning and damp wind bring rain to wet the thirst of a barren and hopeless wasteland. This soothing feeling suddenly shifts Eliot's attention to the Ganges. The precipitation from the Himalayas, the highest point, soothes the inquisitive mind of the poet. The answer lies here. According to the Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma is the Creator. For a poet who has a great inclination towards Eastern beliefs, who craves the revival of a barren land, who laments over the destruction of noble values, the presence of a creator is crucial. 'Datta' (to give), 'Dayadhvam' (to sympathise), and 'Damyata' (to self-control); the three 'Da's should be practised to give up lustful thoughts and pleasures associated with it, to show sympathy and compassion to other people regardless of the class and to control one's mind to have sound thoughts, happy life, just like an expert sailor sailing a boat.

Discussion

The time when Eliot was busy with work, in India, nationalism intensified with the return of Mahatma Gandhi. A series of agitations including the tragic Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place, indiscriminate firing at a crowd including women and children that led to the Non-cooperation Movement. India was struggling against the British Empire. The nucleus of the suffering, the restive masses, everything was the same. The viaduct Eliot constructed instantaneously from the perilous church to the brims of the Ganges thus could not be considered as an accidental one. Anguish, in any form, exceeds the frontiers of language or culture. Its quintessence is universal. Every religion focuses on leading humans to salvation. The prophetic experience of the divine takes place through

human society, through the events of history, and the utterances of great inspired figures. For Eliot, asceticism was the key to salvation. Upanishads and the epics were not the sole influence on Eliot. But he was heavily predisposed to oriental philosophy, strictly out of how it is engrossed in making the lives a lot more uncomplicated and facile, making mankind wiser and calmer, and the fulcrum is meditation. The graveness of the situation prevailing in the waste land, with zero humanity and meaningless rustle and bustle, the spiritual zestfulness can only be wangled through prehistoric thinking, just the way Lord Buddha and St. Augustine promulgated. The locus where the doctrines of these two converge is in the suggestion of a panacea to outshoot all the earthly emotions and salaciousness; asceticism, the rigorous abstention from self-indulgence.

Through those 400 lines, Eliot blended the conditions of culture and society. It encompasses waywardness, egoism, and artificiality as the main characteristics of the current culture. The constant pursuit of a sanctuary to guarantee human survival. The cross-references often imply this quest. In 1917, in his *Tradition and Individual Talent*, Eliot considered poetry not as an expression of personality but as an escape from personality. The gradual development through the years has carved him to an extent that all his experiments were put together to address the common danger, the world truth. As Elizabeth Drew points out, 'All that he can do is escape into poetry and objectively dramatize his experience, a situation where he can create in his fragmentary images the mood of ironic, cynical, nostalgic repulsion and of unromantic disillusionment which mirrors his condition' (663). The cultural psychological and emotional attribution is universal here, traversing all the boundaries of time and distance. To be precise, the projection of the subjective self is to be reflected in the objective realities of the world. For him, the personal traumas he experienced have turned him into the redeemer. This is how the waste land can be called Eliot's spiritual autobiography. Oriental philosophy and Buddhism influenced Eliot mainly because of the experimental dimension it possessed. Although modern Buddhism, with philosophical schools in the West, has progressed remarkably, the word 'Buddhist Enlightenment' still carries the pure essence of it, that is to say, a 'systematic updating of the intellectual foundations of the religion to allow a clear and consistent set of teachings on modern issues to emerge' (Keown 121). This is where the psychic unity still holds the flame. The complications arising out of the dubiety, especially in modern times, L.G. Salinger appreciates the fact that Eliot found a means of expression in poetry for the surface and depths of a representative modern

mind. He also feels that Eliot displays a keen awareness of an intensely sensitive mind. His multi-lingual scholarship contributes to a framework of ideas in which modern English poetry is today read and interpreted. Eliot, Salinger rightly asserts, 'restored intellectual dignity of English poetry'(443).

Conclusion

The Waste Land encompasses a rich flow of cultures. As time passes, the initial meanings are being taken into, modified, and incorporated to get amalgamated into the progress of time and the new thirstful minds. The poem, ending with the benediction, shanti, stands for the ultimate peace that passes all understanding and it does not remain plausible for one particular group, religion, or area. Irrespective of the cultural and external boundaries, the emotions of the people in the phase of chaos and disaster remain the same. Thus parallelism happens in the psyche. This feeling of 'oneness', though during hardships, is extremely important for the World to thrive. This essentialism was, is, and will be of greater importance for humanity. If a poem could essentially convey all sorts of morality and keep on enlightening generations, it in all ways can be considered a treasured one. This universality is what keeps *The Waste Land* holding the line against the appraisals and the test of time.

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