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Search for Values and Truth in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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Abstract:

About TS Eliot the essentials are clear. He was one of the finest poets writing in English in the first half of the twentieth century. More than any other he determined the course that poetry has taken since but has himself remained fresher and more substantial than most poets. He is still emphatically modern. His decisive contributions are the metric he established in his first poem *Prufrock and the Other Observations* (1917), the form he pioneered in *The Waste Land* (1922), and the content he attempted in *Four Quartets* (1934).

Truth and values permeates in the workshop of TS Eliot. The quest for the truth and establishing values in the society has been the mission of the poet. In fact he questions on different issues both physical and metaphysical and answers through the voices. The piece lies not in attuning of mundane thing but it comes by resigning all what we possess.

Introduction:

T.S. Eliot would have enjoyed more his creation today by watching the vast plethora of critical work on than what was during his own time. While Eliot's work is more than half century old, many of poetry lovers and critics experience lack of scope and sympathy in these poems. He, in spite of immense technical skill and variation of style, has been charged of having no deep sympathy with the human condition. He is said to be impassioned with imperfection and sees nothing interesting between the Ape neck Sweeney (Eliot's early poems) and some famous character like Saints and Martyrs. Added to it is our anticipation and helplessness thereon when he delights us without any suggestion, rejecting many beautiful and effective exhibitions. Some of the learned admirers complain of confusion and obscurity but it is also the most nearness of poet's approach to anything. To understand this revolutionary and dynamic poet who keeps a towering and dominating personality, we have to look into the environment present gaudy and feigning harmony producing only barren souls.

English Literature has been attributed with different expectations from different quarters of readers and scholars. When we talk of literature, we mean explicitly *belles*

letters, that is poetry, fiction and so on. Today English Literature has covered a wide area with many extremely intriguing terms like classicism, romanticism, Marxism, expressionism, futurism etc adding to its beauty and treasury. Its evolution, at the same time, has been a continuous process of literary consciousness duly conditioned by the result of latest investigations and researches. The world is 'too much' where provinces of life's activities are broadly accelerated by power and pelf transcending the barriers of time and clime. Modern age has an 'upside down trend' coming a long way to that of ancients. Now it appears that 'literature is an attempt of violent orders from disorders, circumscribing a great disorder into an order.

The other major area that Eliot brings to us his rigorous examination of religious question. They are the result of some repletion on Eliot's part; his critical ideas are challenging as part and parcel of us all. He investigated the whole structure of culture including totality of our time. The nature of culture in which we live, the education we receive, the values we live by, our trends towards material possessions; all these questions continue unbroken, often intensified from Eliot's time to our own. Eliot is seen as *'the man who suffers and the man who creates.'*

Structure of the Paper:

As for as the reference of values and truth in *The Waste Land* is concerned, first of all we take up 'values' for our writing. This poem is the bewildering creation of T.S.Eliot. This poem is notably the release of tension in the poet's mind and Eliot has also admitted it. The Christian world after 'post world war' was caught up by lust, greed and anger. Eliot who felt illusion for the past 20 years could not approve this spiritual miasma. He saw that the whole Europe was burning in the fire of selfishness, greed and lust. Europeans became a kind of galloping consumer. They wanted to consume as much as many as possible. They were living in their own world of materialism. They were the men having nothing to think about past and future. Eliot's line from the chorus vii of 'The Rock' qualifies the nearest experience;

*'Men who turned towards the light
And were known of the light
Invented the higher religions
And the higher religions were good
And they came to an end
A dead and stirred with a flicker of life.'* 1

His further conviction is that;

*'And this has never happened before
Those men both deny Gods and worship Gods
Professing first reason
And then money and power, and what
They call life or race or dialectic.'* (2)

Critics have differing views about this poem. Mr. F.R.Leavis thinks that 'The Waste Land' has anthropological background from Miss J.L. Weston's book, 'From Ritual to Romance'. But there are others who interpret the poem quite differently that it is 'an

experiment with language' (J. Martin), 'it is a pompous parade of erudition' (Louis Untermeyer), 'it is a cry from the wilderness, a call to repentance, disillusionment of a generation and a complete reverence betweenpoetry and all beliefs' (I. A. Richards), 'it is the ascetic shrinking from sexual experience and the distress at the drying up of the springs of sexual emotion, with the straining after a religious emotion which may be made to take its place' (Edmund Wilson). According to Miss Helen Gardiner 'this poem is actually an *inferno* which looks towards *purgatories* and probably a *paradise*.' James Frazer provides another dimension of truth 'man has created God in his own likeness and being himself mortal, he has naturally supposed his creatures to be in the same sad predicament.' (3) The savage people were greatly worried over their physical defeat as such and as a strategy of self-defense, they believed that their man god must be killed. As soon as he shows the signs of his failures, they, living in the lap of nature, became great worshipers of nature. The cycle changed the reason and taught them the lesson of birth, life, decay, death and rebirth. Tortured by the cruelty of winter, they drove the gloomy season away 'through magical rites' and 'made smooth the path for the footsteps of returning spring'. (4)

The next most important thing in the treasury of the Waste Land is 'the legend of Holy Grail' which is desirable to bring forward. The legend has very similitude with the theme of the poem and problem of frailty. It is a medieval legend in which Percival, the Quester, happens to arrive in a country ruled by a prince named the Fisher King. It was whispered that he committed a sin by his soldiering in outraging the chastity of a group of nuns attached to the Grail Chapel. He became physical wreck, maimed and impotent. These men are waiting that the knight of the pure soul shall visit the star crossed the kingdom, answer the question at Chapel Perilous and solve riddles. Tiresias is the central persona having a comprehensive vision. He transcends the barriers of time and place. In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* the chorus says;

'What the lord Tiresias sees, is most often
What the lord Apollo sees.' (5)

He is considered as 'Godly Prophet' in whom alone 'of mankind truth is native'. (6) The words of Tiresias addressed to Oedipus sound a note warning to all the waste Landers of ages;

'You have your eyes but sees not where
You are sin, where you live, nor whom you live with.' (7)

He is a passive spectator, while others are actively engaged in loitering and lustful gratification. Tiresias acts as lens of photo camera. However, he becomes historical sense of Greek Europe and India. He is exploring into all those aspects which may credibly create a consistent ground of belief.

The division of The Waste Land is highly significant for not only its construction but for multiple amalgamation of disparate experiences. All the five movements expose the violated moral norms of essential human values. Spiritual extinction which they disclose to the reader are logically different but they contribute to an organized whole as The Waste Land. It is well known that two movements out of five of the poem are borrowed from the Indian sources. One may interpret the poem in terms of the five elements that constitute life on earth according to Hinduism. I find this most appropriate we can trace hints for them in *the Rig-Veda and Dhammapada*. As Mr. G.N. Rai observes, 'man's search for water came to symbolize his metaphysical quest.' (8)

Now we take up first movement of this bewildering poem 'The Burial of the Dead' for our writing in the reference of search of values and truth in The Waste Land. This movement presents 'a world of evasion, turgid in forgetful snow' where our normal expectations are reversed;

*'April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.'* (9)

It is Tiresias who gives us many vignettes of the waste Landers who have lost communion with nature. The spring has arrived but no springiness is felt by the waste Landers. Marie's wandering in Munich with a man in search of the possibilities of making the best of life. Her life potentials are wasted not so much by any action or intention but simply by inaction. We are familiar with Marie and asked whether we are rooted in a cultural tradition;

*'What are the roots that clutch what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish.'* (10)

Tiresias addresses us as 'Son of Man' but we non-believers can not conceive the existence of cultural values. We are worshipping false Gods of sensuous pleasure and hence we live by mere 'broken images' of our failure and frustration. The 'dry tree' of our decadent culture can not save us from doom.

After observing such spread degradation in whole Europe somewhere Eliot tries to find out a kind of solace in modern scenario because this movement with death culminating in birth. The movement exposés fear, forget, fullness, undue guessing, non-recognition, nothingness, and 'alone crowd' due to non-acceptance, and non-recognition of well established cultural and spiritual values. Each and everyman fixes his eyes before his feet, paces on and on not believing in any sort of communal harmony, fraternity or sacrifice rather they flow up under extreme-selfish motif. Such modern people understand each and every thing but nothing single as meaningful.

In this way the intrinsic quality of this movement presents spectacular hypocrisy post World War I, debased culture, in which selfishness and physical pleasure was in full swing in such a way that no one worries about either realistic rituals or emotions of religious sermons.

Nothing abides them. Their roots are able to bear 'branches' because of collapse of human values. Their search for truth is limited to gratification of their own senses. Any hope for them and redemption are not possible. They can not think anything beyond what they enjoy. However, such enjoyments are developing them into termite which very soon changes their green world into brown one.

However, I would like to take up two things for our writing; the wheel and the ring. It is strikingly Indian conviction of endless stench of human life the ring and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth In fact the wheel can be taken up as four *yogas*.

Now we come up at the second movement of this major poem, 'A Game of Chess'. Chess is a well known for two players played on a board with playing pieces representing queen, king, castle etc. The whole setting of this movement is meant to lure the senses. The wall hanging pictures, mixture and fittings like golden 'Cupidon', satin cases poured in rich profusion, carved Dolphin and other antique mantle are sufficient to trouble, confuse and draw the sense of the visitor. Nevertheless, it is Philomel's picture

which tempts to visitors to some kind of distorted physical union because her cries invoke to dirty ear 'Jug-Jug' meaningless voice. The meeting of the two approaches during night when 'She' says;

*'My nerves are bad to-night, yes, bad, stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak,
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? (11)*

The scene in a cafe or a bar is a parody on intimidation of lawless sex. A woman of 31 having 5 children, all of whom are dead now, represents modern 'look-slim-trim' and 'chase-craze'. They like abortions because someone may raise questions 'You ought to be ashamed' to look so antique. We are not to forget 'Hurry up please its time' and insistence of pub-owner Eliot because the time to return to the values of life is still not lost.

Thus, the second movement is a story of maimed lovers of defunct sense- system. They want to escape from their strange ecstasy to another vulgarity but not in actual life of values. Their decadent activity has made them naked thought wrapped in platitudes and substitute and at the same time stripped off. The vital principle of life is reduced to the level of sex, especially sex without children. This is the sinful violation of the religion, one of the pub- goers says;

*'You are a proper fool, I said
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is I said
What you get married for if you don't want children? (12)*

These lines are significant from the Indian point of view where people attach much importance to marriage and child-begetting. Multifarious interpretations go with the word putra (Son) that he is the 'Purifier' of the family and he is the 'Saviour' of his father's suffering.

In this way, Eliot's search for truth in the civilization appears to be an affair of the heart not of the mind. It appeals to the consciousness not to the intellect. The social belief in these norms leading to truth is puzzling. If belief and behavior go together and the human values are reduced to animal like disbelief, the mankind badly needed not a repairing but a full-fledged over hauling to survive.

The third movement of this poem is 'The Fire Sermon' in which we pace with Tiresias and come down to the bank of the Thames, the scene of outdoor flirtation and cheap sexual games outside marriage. It is a world of automatic lust where men and women are burning in the fire of passion. The description of the river scene evokes a sense of the loss of purity and chastity. Tiresias' mind flies to Edmund Spenser's 'Prothalamion' in which nymphs strew the river with flower to honor the marriage of the daughters of the Earl of the Worcester in 1596. Now the river is visited in summer by society girls along with their customers, moneyed commercial Bosses who leave behind them;

*'.....Empty bottles, sandwich papers
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights.'(13)*

However it is winter, they are not seen here .The poor girls, whose maidenhood was lost in the last summer, do not know the whereabouts of those demons of sex because they did not deem it proper to give these girls their addresses fearing that they would be involved in trouble if any of the girls are carrying. Trederich Hoffman's

comment on such sex relation is worth quoting; 'love is not love if it can not be identified with addresses with the circumstances of home, the responsibility of human continuity, it is only an incident something quickly indulged in and forgotten source of boredom.' (14)

Tiresias recalls another scene of debauchery at the lake where he shed tears on the fate of the poor girls who sold themselves to the libidinous fashionable gentleman. Tiresias gives another portrait of a sexual pervert Mr. Eugenides, the Symrna merchant with all the paraphernalia of the business class, to whom sex is merely a commodity which he purchases wherever he likes. This time he invites Tiresias to on at 'The canon street Hotel' followed by a weakened at the Metro pole,

Luxury hotel at Brighton. In the legend of the Grail, there is a reference to the Syrian merchant carrying fertility cult of Europe. People said that these merchants considered their commerce and religion as their two eyes. Mr. Eugenides, being one eyed means that his eyes of religion are blind.

It is Tiresias who is walking 'along the strand up Queen Victoria Street' the voice of the music of her gramophone is still creeping by him upon the waters of the Thames. In this part of the city that is far from the debauchery of the cultured and civilized fashionable society, there are still alive traditions of community life among the fisherman who live under the shadow of the church;

*'This music crept by me upon the waters,
And along the Strand up Queen Victoria Street.'* (15)

Thus this section closes on a note of the promise of redemption from the sin of the flesh through repentance. Such scenes have been committed by men in the past as well after repenting of their sin they became saints. St. Augustine is an example whose words Tiresias quote here. In his youth St. Augustine could not restrain his sensual temptations about which he wrote in his confession;

*'.....to Carthage then I came,
Where a cauldron of unholy loves song all
About mine ears.'* (16)

Tiresias juxtaposes Buddha's views on human passions with Augustine's view. Lord Buddha says in his 'Fire Sermon' that everything is on fire

*'All things, O priests are on fire.....The eye,
O Priest is on fire, forms are on fire, eye consciousness is on
fire, impressions received by the eye are on fire, and what ever sensation, pleasant,
unpleasant, indifferent, originates in dependence on impressions received by the eyes,
that also is on fire.'* (17)

Now this movement closes on a note of hope, repentance of the past sins, followed by abstention from the indulgence of inculcation of the spirit of self- abnegation may spiritually rehabilitate a degenerate soul.

Now we take up fourth movement of this poem 'Death by Water' for my writing in the reference of values and truth in The Waste Land. Water has been essential for life but this life-giving water is causing the death of modern disbelievers. This movement is one of the most cryptic comments on modern development of commerce and industries. The people have become so much money-minded that they forget 'the cry of gulf'. They can sacrifice everything in counting their profit and loss. The whole narration becomes subtle with reference of Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor. Eliot traces modern explorers with a passion of worldly pleasure which devours them.

Phoenicians were famous for their strength during Trojan War. They were able to carry out anything impossible. Phlebas was handsome and tall. Modern people belonging to commercial class are also equally handsome and tall but they are not being guided by moral and spiritual principals. Such class included Gentile or Jew i.e. those who rejected God and those who were faithful believers. George Williamson rightly observed that 'this part describes the usual way of becoming free from the fire of passion, not the way of self- discipline.' (18) These people turn the wheel of life themselves resulting into secularization and rejection of the supernatural.

The movement aims at crystallized message to the civilization which has turned into global fraternity in trade. The trade has soured the human trade so much so that it has almost gone corrupted. The desire for march-grapes and June- mangoes throughout the year is alright as for as it is not disturbing the course of the nature but the desire for the things like preserving forever by fighting against decaying the body old age is against the law of life and the rule of God. Likewise the modern trade oriented experiments could be permissible until the law of nature and the rule of God is not broken. Eliot himself has beautifully drawn the exploiting picture of spiritual vacuity in the 3rd Chorus of 'The Rock';

*'O weariness of men who turn from God
To the grandeur of you mind and the glory of your action*

.....
.....

*Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
Dividing the stars into common and preferred.'* (19)

The next movement is 'What the Thunder Said' of this bewildering poem. In this movement we search a prayer for redemption to the degenerated modern lot especially selected in previously four movements. Tiresias finds that modern men can not discriminate between good and evil. On the third day after crucification of Lord Christ people go to Emmaus and when the resurrected Christ walks a few steps with them, one of them enquire;

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

.....
.....

But who is that other side of you? (20)

Hollow ritualism in the name of religion could be seen as mere physical journey to the Chapel Perilous. Parsifal, the knight reaches there and finds that;

'In the decayed hole among the mountains

.....
.....

There is the empty Chapel, only the winds home.' (21)

The warning to mankind of part iii, 'The Fire Sermon' against their lustfully enmeshing activities was;

*'But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of bones, and chuckle
Spread from ear to ear.'* (22)

Along with similar lines as;

'White bodies naked on the low dame ground

And bones cast in a little low dry garret

Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.'(23)

reflect contemporary lifelessness. In this part, Eliot observes about the condition of the Chapel where;

'Dry bones can harm no one,

Only a cock stood on the rooftree

Co co rico co co rico.'(24)

If Eliot juxtaposes the bones of Christian and Indian tradition we can this allusion with *Dadhich* story. It is noteworthy that Eliot has time and again elaborated upon his conviction that tryst with the sordid and disgusting is essential for environing the beautiful and the ideal. In a wider perspective, we may say that Eliot believes that when everything we have cherishing, material as well as spiritual, is totally destroyed, we may feel the necessity of a new spiritual foundation of life. Eliot has brilliantly directed occidental faith to find solace in orientalism by narrating the 'Sunken Ganga' and its subsequent spiritual connections to redemption. Actually speaking, he stresses utmost attention with conviction by mixing Indian discipline; be spiritual, ethical, political or intellectual. The poetic lines run thus;

'Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves

Waited for rain, while the black clouds

Gathered far distant, over Himavant

The jungle crouched, humped in silence,

Then spoke the thunder.'(25)

The Indian myth and Eliot's bringing of it closing movement of 'The Waste Land' is significant. It reminds us of the movement of great spiritual crisis which occurred in the holy land of the Hindus. Ganga is the very blood- stream and the sinking of its water is naturally symptomatic of the low vitality of the spirit in the Indian community. Credit goes to T S Eliot for having brought Ganga to currency and one feels as though the river burst its banks and flooded the dry plains below where countless empires flourished in the past and still flourish. It was *Sagar* and *Bhagirath* who did so much by way of prayer, meditation, piety, diligence, concern and penance to bring the Ganga down to earth to render it green and holy. *Bhagirathi's* wish was only to bring the Ganga down to wash the ashes of the dead sons of *Sagar*.

T.S. Eliot's indebtedness to the Hindu scriptures becomes quite explicit. He takes an allusion from an episode in the *Brihadaranyak Upanishad* which describes how gods, men, and demons (*devah, manusyah and asurah*) approached *Prajapati* who was their father- preceptor for instruction after completing their formal education. To them, he uttered the syllable *Da Da Da*. For Gods he instructed *Damyata* which mean 'control yourself.' Second *Da* which was spoken for men was *Datta* means 'to give'. Third *Da* for demons was *Dayadhavam* means 'be compassionate'. This very thing the heavenly voice of thunder repeats *Da Da Da* that is control yourself, be compassionate, and to give. One should practice this triad self- control, giving, and compassion.

Obviously, the three fold message of the thunder is conceptual symbol. It is noteworthy that Eliot exploitably changed the order in which the words *Damyata Datta* and *Dayadhavam* appear in *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless Eliot tried to suit his material by twisting order. Eliot was perhaps convinced that *Datta* or to give is the turning point of spiritual salvation because;

*'The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed.'*(26)

Dayadhavam the second command is an emotional bond of union between two person, the men of the modern waste land live in a dark self and crave for fresh air.

The pealing of thunder third time reveals as *Damyata*. In a wider sense, it means discipline which makes the journey of life easier;

'.....the boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar.'(27)

A disciplined heart is like a boat that sails easily and smoothly under expert guidance on a calm sea. Spiritual discipline implies control over sensuous desires. Eliot emphasizes that one has to cultivate self- discipline and live in harmony with the eternal law. Self- discipline is trusted anchor in the ragging sea of life. He discloses the true course of the inhabitants of 'The Waste Land' as inaction. He thinks;

'Shall I, at least, set my lands in order?' (28)

It is to be remarked here that the *Buddha* is sometimes pictured in the attitude of a fisherman according to Miss J.L. Weston. He is called in the *Mahayana* scriptures '*the fisherman who draws fish from the ocean of Samsara to the light of salvation.*'(29) This fragments tend to highlight the value of soul over flesh, of metaphysics or materialism as a measure to set the disorderly lands in order. In a disarrayed world, the poet in the guise of protagonist wants to play the role the role of *Hieronymus* of Thomas Kyd's '*The Spanish Tragedy*' who pretended to have gone mad , although he was actually not so, in order to take revenge upon the killers of his son Horatio.

The poet would deem his duty well-done and his plan is miraculously successful only when his following message is accepted in the troubled modern world;

'Datta, Dayadhavam, Damyata,

Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.'(30)

The word *Shantih* has been repeated thrice with a purpose in mind to indicate the absolute three dimensional peaces resulting from a freedom from all disturbances from within (*adhyatmikam*), from above (*adidainikam*), from around (*adibhoutikam*). Again, as far as the right interpretation of Eliot's *Shantih* is concerned, it is his human concern for the betterment of the world. When the poet thinks of 'setting his lands in order' he echoes an insight which includes both aesthetic experience and spiritual realization.

In this way, The Waste Land is both 'the development and the decline of religious feeling in modern world. Thus, the poem of despair ends on a note of expectation, the season in hell opens out on to the hope of salvation.'

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