



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English Literature

REFLECTION OF HINDU AND BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY IN T.S ELIOT'S 'WASTE LAND.'

KEY WORDS: Buddhist Philosophy, Hindu Philosophy, The Waste Land, T.S Eliot, Upanishads, Vedas.

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ABSTRACT

The Indian spiritual thoughts are inundated with enduring values and timeless appeal, which has carved a niche in Eliot's mind. Its universal appeal has the ability to allure all categories of people starting from the illiterate to the elite, from the peasant to the perfectionist, from the writer to the religious preacher with a profound sense of high moral character and ethical living. The soil of Eliot's poetic fervor has been properly prepared with the manure and fertilizer of the Indian religious thought which provides a balanced nutrition to the seedling of The Waste Land. In order to examine how far oriental wisdom influences Eliot's poetic vision and sensibility to give it a universal undertone running parallel with the wisdom of Europe, this study attempts to trace the reflections of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy in Eliot's famous poem The Waste Land. The everlasting ideals and eternal attractiveness of Indian spirituality have left a lasting impression on Eliot. From the ignorant to the elite, from the peasant to the perfectionist, from the writer to the religious preacher with a great sense of high moral character and ethical life, its global appeal has the power to enchant all sorts of people. Eliot's poetic fervour has been dutifully prepared with the manure and fertiliser of Indian religious thinking, which gives the seedling of The Waste Land a nutritious diet. Eliot's relationships with mentors like Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, Charles Rockwell Lanman, and James Haughton, as well as the Oriental Study Centre at Harvard, have been carefully analysed to determine the effect of Indian ideas on Eliot's thinking. Each section of the poem has been examined in order to comprehend how meticulously Eliot depicts the tragic impasse of modern humanity due to spiritual draught and how at each stage Indian thoughts, specifically Buddhism and Hinduism with its Vedic and Upanishadic lore stand as yardstick to restore spiritualism by centralising the moral vision of European Waste Landers, which centres on the Christian intent that formed Eliot's Indian sensibility.

DISCUSSION:

Many intellectuals of nineteenth and century from western nations were fascinated by India's ancient wisdom. Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Eliot are few of them who were heavily affected by Indian scriptures and wrote poetry that was tinged with an Indian aura in the middle of the nineteenth century. Because of this, "[t]here was a deep desire to have firsthand acquaintance with Indian thoughts" (Sastri 248). Lanman launched the Harvard Oriental Series in 1884 by being the first to publish his Sanskrit Reader. He did this by sowing the following seeds of Indian ideas in the soil of Europe:

Already enough pioneering work in this direction had been done by European scholars; and then enlightened students of Culture did not close their minds to the winds blowing from India. This was the currents of ideas in which at the turn of the century many Americans found themselves. Possibly the activities of Swami Vivekananda too had a powerful influence in moulding this atmosphere. (Sastri 248)

Harvard was already a renowned centre for Oriental studies when Eliot arrived. He was fortunate to have learned mentors like James Haughton Woods, George Santayana, Irving Babbitt, Charles Rockwell Lanman, and Josiah Royce. Babbitt and George Santayana served as his primary sources of inspiration for taking an interest in Indian scriptures and philosophy. In 1910, Eliot received his master's degree, and James Haughton and Charles Rockwell Lanman began teaching Sanskrit at Harvard University. He thereupon enrolled himself in Lanman's Indic Course and began studying Sanskrit, Pali, Hinduism, and Buddhism as a part of an Ideology course at Harvard in 1911. Eliot, according to E.L. Mayo, was profoundly affected by Babbitt, whose "system of thought was based upon the study of the Pali manuscripts, the earliest authentic Buddhist document" (173). Eliot was also drawn to Buddhism when he was a young child, and at one point he gave the idea of becoming a Buddhist significant consideration. The Light of Asia, a lengthy epic poem by Sir Edwin Arnold about the life of Gautam Buddha, still held a special place in his heart. He studied the Pali, Pantajali, Upanishads, and Vedas. He says without holding back, "Long ago I studied the ancient Indian languages, and while I was

chiefly interested at that time in Philosophy, I read a little poetry too, and I know that my poetry shows the influence of Indian thought." (Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture 248)

The Waste Land can be seen as the poet's attempt to release the stress and anxiety he felt as he saw modern western society fall apart under the influence of lust, greed, and rage in the years following World War II. In accordance with his diagnosis, modern humanity is spiritually dead, and this stage of the spiritual miasma will result in its utter obliteration. Eliot wrote this poem as western civilization had degenerated to its terrible standstill. How could Eliot, a thoughtful and sensitive scholar, support this spiritual aridity? He believed and championed spiritualism as the only means of freeing modern humanity from the desert of spiritual miasma due to his Unitarian outlook and moral bent of thought. Eliot was aware that this situation cannot be rectified if he restricts his efforts to the west alone. Therefore, in order to support his conclusion, he galloped throughout the world in an effort to gather wisdom in order to provide a cure for this ailment. This helps to understand some of his interests in Indian religion and metaphysics.

In order to achieve this goal, Eliot adopted the mythical method proposed by Jessie Weston and James Frazer. However, he believes that these would not be sufficient for the regeneration of contemporary humanity. Eliot views parallelism and contrast technique as a significant literary device for poetic purpose in order to lay bare the problem with its suggestive solutions lying therein. Being a sincere and devoted supporter of spiritualism, he seeks to justify his faith in Indian ideas by turning to Oriental wisdom and philosophising his vision of spiritual regeneration in this desolate country of contemporary humanity:

The problem, as undertaken in the poem, has been tried to be resolved in a universal solution, taking material from among different sources world-wide. He has analyzed the philosophies, and also the scriptures at large, and has synthesized his findings on different sources for a solution which could be acceptable to everyone, without stakes of either religion or boundary. Vedic philosophy, as part of

Hinduism, has been contributed as an annihilating solution to the problem of both animalism and restraint. (Dangwal 20)

If Indian and Western cultures are combined, this does not appear disparaging given The Waste Land's fabric's basic texture. G. Nageswara Rao does not hold back when he writes in his well-known essay "The Upanishad in the Waste Land" that "two out of the five section headings of the poems are borrowed from Indian sources. One may interpret the poem in terms of five elements which constitute life on the earth according to Hinduism." (84)

In contrast to Eliot's poetic vision, which is not dry but is founded on the understanding that man is a vital component of the system of creation, what he actually sees is a landscape of sterility and devastation in which he has lost all power over his sexual and spiritual nature. In his vision, man is not seen as a mere composition of flesh and bones existing in this imperfect world as spiritually dead, but rather as a spiritually awakened existence in this cosmos with the microcosmic essence of the Almighty. He claimed that man's awareness of metaphysics makes him uniquely human. He must always try to cultivate spiritual awareness by centralizing morality in his life which is the gift of Almighty bestowed upon him, but without this centralization of spiritual and moral vision, he is nothing but a dead fragment without the flow of blood in his vein and soul which throbs as his conscience. At the very outset of the poem in part one "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot has evocatively referred to the living death of modern humanity but at the same time evokes the prospect of spiritual rejuvenation with the drop of rainwater:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot, 1-4)

Eliot alludes to a spiritual void and draught through this subtle imagistic objective-correlative of a lifeless winter and a reviving spring with its drop of water, which can be filled by the understanding of Oriental scriptures and that of Buddha that man should work out for his salvation Nirvana through atoning for the sins he has committed in the past.

Even though Eliot had already hinted in his notes that the title was taken from Miss Jessie Weston's essay From Ritual to Romance, where she focused on fertility and vegetation cults and the significance of the Grail Legend to restore fertility to the barren land through the expiation of Oedipus of Thebes' sins, who is then identified as Fisher King in the final section of the poem for which a journey in search of the Holy Grail is to be undertaken.

The barren area of spiritual disorder where man lives will become a land of flora and fertility when water is sprinkled on it. Therefore, man must begin his hunt for water, which stands in for belief in the existence of God. This judgement of Eliot suggests that he made a wise choice in using the title The Waste Land to contrast modern and western knowledge and to suggest a remedy for the issue of spiritual draught. From an Indian perspective, the meaning of the poem's title can be found in the Dhammapada, a key Buddhist text in which Gautam Buddha advises people to become spiritually aware of themselves in order to cultivate Bodhi Trees in their hearts:

In any case we should find it illuminating to read a Thai Buddhist monk's translation of Dhammapada under the title 'Growing the Bodhi Tree in the garden of the Heart . . .' The question now is how to grow the seeds of this tree in the heart of everyone of us – which is analogous to the re-enactment of crucifixion in the life of every Christian. The land is wasted and the seeds have no chance to grow without the water. There are verses in the Dhammapada which say they should be irrigated well with the waters of compassion and richly manured by meditation. (Narasimhaiah 97-98)

This implies that realising oneself and learning about the Absolute Brahma are achieved via meditation and atonement. Man should therefore seek enlightenment in order to work for his redemption.

In the second section of "A Game of Chess," Eliot illustrates the terrible situation that modern humanity finds itself in because it lacks even the most fundamental understanding of higher values. They are so preoccupied with animalism that they have lost sight of their humanity. Sex is a fundamental aspect of existence since "man's fate originates in sex," yet today it serves as a source of intrigue between men and women rather than serving as a means of reproduction. The most sacred institution, marriage, has been degraded to the same level as drug addiction and has become a pure excuse to indulge sensual and carnal pleasures without any regard for obligations to one's family. They see existence as nothing more than "a game of chess" on this planet. Domestic life and marital life function mechanically. Regarding this matter, Dr. Surekha Dnagwal states, "The guy is not ready to shoulder responsibility, and the woman is not ready to have children. The world is meant to come to a standstill one day if the attitude, like the waste-landers, continues to increase (20–21). The Albert and Lil episode highlights the emptiness of married life:

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly dead of young
George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been
the same.
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? (Eliot,
160-66)

They see existence as nothing more than "a game of chess" on this planet. Domestic life and marital life function mechanically. Regarding this matter, Dr. Surekha Dnagwal states, "The guy is not ready to shoulder responsibility, and the woman is not ready to have children. The world is meant to come to a standstill one day if the attitude, like the waste-landers, continues to increase (20–21). The Albert and Lil episode highlights the emptiness of married life: Lil, the lady, breached the purity of marriage after using drugs, and she also interfered with the process of reproduction itself. In this poem, Eliot makes the argument that sex is an important aspect of human life and that men and women should follow Sanyam's example if they want to have access to birth control.

The third section's title, The Fire Sermon, was translated from Pali by Bhikkhu Thanissaro and is based on the Adittapriyay Sutta (S.N.35). It demonstrates the poet's close academic and personal ties to Buddhist thought. The Fire Sermon is the third discourse that Lord Buddha gave, according to the Vinaya, the code of conduct for Buddhist monks. The sermon is delivered by the Buddha to an audience of a thousand fire-worshipping monks several months after his awakening. Buddha instructs his disciples using the metaphor of fire in his superb teaching method. This lecture frees the ascetics from sorrow and unrest and leads to full awakening (arahatta). The late Henry Clarke Warren was a well-known western researcher of Buddhism who produced Buddhism in Translation (Harvard Oriental Series), which could be a trustworthy source for statements that appear in the Buddha's Fire Sermon and are comparable to the Sermon on the Mount in terms of prominence. Buddha tells his listeners in this talk that everything is aflame. The eye is on fire, together with shapes, eye consciousness, impressions received by the eye, and any sensations—pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent—that stem from those impressions and are transmitted to the brain.

And what are these burning with? I declare that this is done "with the fire of passion, the fire of hatred, and the fire of

infatuation." However, when he aspires to a hypothetical civilised society, Eliot subtly alludes to this eastern ascetic and the famous Buddhist preacher. The poem's abundance of obscene sexual encounters hasn't done much to bring fertility to the desolate region. The Lord Buddha advises his followers to give up worldly lust and seek independence from worldly ties. The core of Buddhist and Hindu philosophy is the concept of non-attachment that Buddha established. In keeping with his ascetic approach to Indian mysticism, Eliot ends this section with the word "burning." Exasperated, the poet prays to God for relief from the burning lust that afflicts him and his fellow citizens by elevating them into the transcendental world:

" O Lord Thou pluckest me out
 Lord Thou pluckest
 Burning." (Eliot, 309)

Again, Eliot's familiarity with Indian philosophy and religion is shown in the meditation form of the concluding section, What the Thunder Said. These stanzas anticipate the poet's end-of-the-world prophecy in a wise-like manner. Like a devoted Christian, he mentions Christ's Crucifixion at the opening of this section. Eliot said it best:

" He who was living is now dead
 We who were living are now dying." (Eliot, 50-51)

The awful situation of the banished waste landers who live a life of death in the 'desert plain' is what he is trying to convey here. He consciously turns his attention away from Christianity and towards Hinduism since he believes in Hindu myths. As Eliot borrows the Upanishad's fundamental phrase—God created the senses turn outwards, not within himself—for the title of this section, his orientation towards Indian spirituality becomes clear. But on rare occasions, a brave individual seeking immortality has turned around and discovered themselves. The poet maintains his confidence in eastern philosophy, which he feels may be able to offer an alternative for the resurrection of humanity, despite the terrible pollution of European society. In his opinion, the removal of the spiritual sterility that was prevalent in the culture at the time is the only way to replace the physical sterility that he elaborates on throughout the poem. He ends the poem with this passage, when rain falls to replenish the parched earth and provide fecundity to the disturbed spirit, to emphasise his position. The poet is seen in these stanzas ruminating on the Upanishad's set of morals for restoring a cogent ethos. He therefore hears the voice of Prajapati Brahma teaching his three classes of offspring the lesson of understanding the meaning of existence in the echo of the thunder. This is, in my opinion, a significant justification of the poet's intimate familiarity with Hindu tale, which he purposefully illustrated to assuage the modern man's agonised heart. Eliot referred to the syllable "DA" in the sound of rumbling thunder as a symbol for his profound comprehension of the fundamental principles advanced in the Upanishads. Part V, Chapter II of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which translates to "forest of great wilderness," has an explanation of the fable involving "DA" and serves to spread a message of humanity. Paul Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, (1897), p. 489, mentions a translation. The story goes as follows: Prajapati Brahma, the Creator of all things, was once approached for advice by his three distinct sorts of offspring—the Devas, Manuśyas, and Āsuras—on how to conduct a disciplined life after completing their studies in Brahmacharya (celibacy). He therefore calls the divine beings first and counsels them to follow "DA." The Lord questioned whether or not they knew what "DA" stood for. They replied that it stood for "Damayata," meaning the exercise of restraint. Hindu mythology claims that Devas, or angels, are the most pleasure-seeking of these three categories, thus they interpreted this message as a command to restrain their opulent nature. For people, he kept saying the same sound, "DA." 'Datta' or 'give' was understood by them as a result of this statement. Men are naturally miserly with their

sharing of money. Their conscience therefore urged them to show kindness. Again Brahma spoke the term 'DA' for the ruthlessly vicious demons. They consequently acquired the skill of "Dayavata," or showing mercy to other creatures.

After 3,000 years of existence, these three cardinal virtues—temperance, charity, and compassion for life—recommended by the vedic seers had a significant influence on the poet Eliot. The poet was inspired to foretell the ways of human salvation by the dreadful vision of a spiritual drought that threatens their ability to survive, which is why he made numerous allusions to the Upanishad. The poet's skill is evident right here. Here, the rumbling thunder represents the poet's mouthpiece, which is resonating a sound in the abandoned environment. Eliot used the classic parable to illustrate the spiritual decline of modern man in his poem, drawing inspiration from the Upanishad:

"DA
 Datta:What have we given?
 My friend,blood shaking my heart
 ... the beneficent spider
 ... the lean solicitor
 DA
 Dayadhvam:I have heard the key
 We think of the key, each in his prison
 ...
 DA
 Damayata:The boat responded
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
,beating obedient
 To controlling hands" (Eliot, 401-407)

These lyrics explain the poet's attempt to warn the supposedly civilised perverts.

Our ascetic-poet expressed what Prajapati Brahma taught His three different categories of students for all mankind in general. The explanation is clear: humans are manifestations of both good and evil spirits. Sometimes the divine takes control of us, and other times our animal nature takes control. Once more, our human-like egoism or selfishness controls us. The poet emphasises this mythical lesson for all people who contain gods, demons, and their true masculine selves. Eliot exhorts humanity in the lines above to dedicate one's entire life for a good cause, to feel for each person who is imprisoned in the waste land, and to control one's own self when it starts to spiral out of control.

With the usage of the phrase "Shantih Shantih Shantih" three times, the poem comes to a happy conclusion (433). In his *New Bearings in English Poetry*, Mr. F.R. Leavis criticises the poem, saying that "It exhibits no progression" and "moves in circles." "The thunder brings no rain to revive the waste land, and the poem ends where it begins" (103). The intent of Eliot, who himself disregarded the allegation of the virtues of "give," "sympathise," and "control," however, appears to get muddled with this criticism of Leavis. To better comprehend Eliot's motivation for including Shantih and Da in the poem's structure, the following Conrad Aiken observation is worth quoting: "Why, again, Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayata? Or Shantih? Do they not say a good deal less than 'Give'; Sympathize; Control or Peace? Of course, but Mr. Eliot replies that he wants them not merely to mean those particular things, but also to mean them in a particular way, that is, to be remembered in connection with a Upanishad" (193). In addition, Eliot gave the idea of "action" at the conclusion by asking, "Shall I at least set my hands, in order?" (425). The protagonist (Tiresius and Prajapati) accepts the position of the Fisher King at a time when "London bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down" (426) after realising the urgent need for "Karma." It should be noted that, according to Miss J. L. Weston, the Buddha occasionally appears with a fisherman's expression. The fisherman brings fish from the Samundra to the light of salvation in the Mahayana scriptures. The

fisherman, or Buddha, is needed in order to release the fish. Additionally, the poem's final word, "Shantih," has significance from an Indian perspective. "The word Shantih is purposefully repeated there to indicate peace resulting from a freedom from all disturbance from within (*adhyadmikam*), from above (*adidaivikam*) and from around (*adi bhoutikam*)" (Rao 89). Regarding the importance and applicability of Shantih, Dr. Surekha Dnagwal states: "The Shantih - Chanting appears for the first time in the Yajurveda (36:17). In the Vedic way of life, it is a component of both ritual and religious activities. Although he does not automatically use these terms, Eliot wants "the universe to be at peace, including peace for the waste landers, those who live in acute atmospheres of awe, fear, doubt, and frustration" (31). In conclusion, The Waste Land exhibits a significant amount of Indian knowledge. To limit it to pure Indianness, however, would not be a proper defence of this poetry, which has a universal outlook and includes Buddhist, Hindu, and Vedic religious overtones as part of the poet's universal approach.

CONCLUSION:

The study work has examined how deeply Hindu and Buddhist thought are reflected in T.S. Eliot's masterpiece, "The Waste Land." It becomes clear that Eliot's work is an amazing fusion of Eastern beliefs with modernist sensibilities through a careful investigation of the poem's themes, imagery, and philosophical underpinnings. The study has brought attention to the overarching theme of disappointment and spiritual desolation in "The Waste Land," equating it with the core ideas of impermanence and suffering found in Buddhism and Hinduism. A rich heritage of ideals and vitality is envisioned by the Indian spiritual tradition. It is overflowing with ageless ideals and appeal that have even found a home in the works of eminent Western poets, playwrights, and critics like T.S. Eliot, who saw these concepts as the ultimate and perfect cure for today's evils. The position of man in the Great Chain of Beings is preeminent. He must have ended up on a wasteland as a result of his derailment from the track. He should uphold the highest Indian spiritual ideals embodied in the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, which have had a long-lasting impact on Indian culture and served as the foundation for the formation of both personal and societal moral codes. The rich texts of India, as well as a grasp of their essence, can help everyone achieve the balance they require. This will be advantageous for both the Indian society and the entire planet. Readers can learn more about Eliot's literary masterwork and the contribution of Eastern philosophies to modernist literature through this study. In addition to enhancing the poem's cultural and intellectual depth, the Hindu and Buddhist principles that are reflected in "The Waste Land" also serve as evidence of how relevant these ancient philosophies are to modern society.

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