



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Education Analysis and Development – IJMREAD

Peer-Reviewed : Open Access Journal

T. S. Eliot and His ‘The Waste Land’

Dr Sandeep Kumar Gupta

Assistant Professor (Dept of English)

Govt Degree College Bhojpur, Moradabad

skguptagdc@gmail.com

Abstract

T. S. Eliot was a conscious poet who had thought long and deep about the mysteries of his own art. He marks a complete break from the 19th century tradition. He abandoned the loving theory that all art is principally an appearance of the artist's character. His Waste Land (1922) is most important poem. It is regarded a highly condensed epic of the modern age. The Waste Land is an interwar brings down to earth and depression set forward by wide-ranging sequences of descriptions constructed upon man's bookish and civilizing history. The Waste Land is a city populated by those for whom current existence provides only a pile of broken images and “fear in a handful of dust” it is a civilization dying of spiritual thought.

Keywords- Spirituality, Barrenness, Fertility, Vanity, Vulgarization, Faith etc.

Introduction-

T. S. Eliot is one of the most classical and representative poets in English poetry of the 20th century. He is a great realist and always conscious about the problem of modern civilization. He was awarded British order of Merit award and The Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

T.S. Eliot was a great scholar of the classics. He had the command over five great languages - English, French, German, Italian and Latin. He began writing poetry with a conviction that poetry must be difficult. The ‘Waste Land’ is the example of such type of poetry. It is so difficult that no one could understand it thoroughly. Eliot has also accepted the charge that his poetry is difficult, but he asserted the modern poetry, expressing variety and complexity of modern civilization, must be difficult. He was highly impressed with the poetry of Dante and John Donne. He called Dante as the great master of simple style. So, it can be stated that this classicism involves certain elements of Dante's style. His poetry is revolt against the romantic theory of poetry, which we observed in William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, John Keats, P. B. Shelley etc. The romantic theory of poetry is the expression of the personality. Eliot does not agree with the romantic theory of poetry. He, therefore, propounded his own theory of poetry and he is of the view- ‘Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the appearance of character, but a flee from character’. As a conscious artist, like the classical poets he achieved formal perfection. His classical poetry is marked by impersonal and universal elements. He has presented human infirmities and tensions in different forms. The first volume of poetry-‘Prufrock and other observations’ was published in 1917. It presented pessimism, depression and dejection of the modern age in ironical way. He has raised his poetic language to the classical standard. Eliot maintains that language should be raised to the higher level like the classical authors. His poetry is the reflection of changing condition of the modern age. Eliot has been able to mirror social, cultural and moral conditions with the help of intellectual energy and experimental technique. His poetry is remarkable for satire, irony, hypocrisy, vanity and pettiness of the 20th century.

There is no room for emotion and feelings in his poems. Eliot is specially the poet of mind and not that of heart. He rejected the approach of the poet of 19th century. T.S. Eliot expresses hollowness of modern civilization of the society. He is an earnest and bitter critic of urban life style and exposes its hypocrisy of the materialistic society. He got name and fame with the publication of his most celebrated and narrative poem The Waste Land. This poem is a land-mark in the history of 20th century English poetry for it has reflected the mood of spiritual decline and frustration after the First World War.

The poem has been written off as into five parts- 'The burial of the Dead', 'The Game of the Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water', and 'What the Thunder Said!' These five sections of the poem are to be considered the five movements of Tiresias in The Waste Land. Throughout the poem, he appears and helps to give the work unity. All figures and sights are seen by aging man Tiresias. He plays a crucial role in all the movements of The Waste Land.

The movement of the poem is 'The Burial of the Dead'. Here dead are those people who have lost their faith in spirituality, religion and God in commercialized society. The poet points out that life has lost all its meaning and significance as it is now devoid of faith. For life without faith is in reality death and this is brought out in the following lines of The Waste Land:

Unreal city

Under the Brown Fog of a winter dawn
I had not thought death had undone
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, And
each man fixed his eyes.....

(The Waste Land, Lines, 60-65)

The poet pictures a desolate world, which has become so much bankrupt in moral and spiritual values that it has stirred the basic fabrics of our culture and civilization. The fact is that men have lost the knowledge of good and evil keeps them from being alive. Tiresias comments on the month of April as the cruellest though it is the month of rebirth, joy and happiness yet it is not the most delightful season for the people of the waste land. Eliot's disappointment, which is characteristic of the post-war world, is given a new meaning and significance when he asserts;

April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs
out of the dead land, mixing Memory and
desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Tiresias asks a German princess named Marie up to what are reactions about spring season. She replies that she enjoyed with her lover in winter and they walked in Hofgarten park at Munich. They had coffee in cafeteria together and talked for hours she also points out him that she is very fond of reading. The function of this conversation is to establish to some extent the class and character of the protagonist. He answers for himself: Son of Man, A heap of broken images where the beats And the dead tree gives no shelter..... (The Waste Land, Lines, 20-24) In the second movement of the poem entitled- "A Game of Chess", the poet presents a series of pictures of the

contemporary life with all its dullness and boredom. The poet here depicts a room of London which is filled with luxurious items like jewels, perfumes, satin cases, Vials of Ivory, coloured glasses, dressing table etc. it is the drawing room of Lady Mrs. Equitone who is known as Lady of the rocks.

She is sitting in her chair, which bright like that of throne. The glory of modern life finds complete expression though the description of luxurious boudoir with all its magnificence and remind us of the immortal lines William Shakespeare in Antony and Cleopatra. These are the opening lines of the Game of Chess:

The chair she sat in like burnished throne
From which golden Cupidon peeped out.

(The Waste Land, Lines, 77-80)

The third section entitled- The Fire Sermon opens with the description of Thames river. It contains a contrast between the grandeur and the glory of the past and the sordid pleasure of the present. The title The Fire Sermon has been quoted from Buddha's Sermon which preached by him against the fire of lust, anger, envy and the other passions that consume men. The poet had studied the Vedas, Upnishads, The Gita etc. and had the knowledge of Sanskrit. He was highly impressed by the preaching of Lord Buddha. He has presented Indian thoughts in this section. Eliot has applied the title to invite our attention on modern man's sexual depravity.

Tiresias perceives that everything is deserted in winter season. Different kind of dried leaves are scattered to and fro over the bank. The wind is blowing and Tiresias is hearing its noise. The fashionable ladies who belong to rich families, are no longer over here. He is watching on the bank of the river and he says to himself that there are no empty bottles of cold-drinks, the wrappers of sandwiches, Cigarette-ends and handkerchiefs which women forget to pick-up. Tiresias remarks:

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard, boxes, cigarette-ends Or
other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are
Departed.

(The Waste Land, Lines, 176-180)

Here Tiresias expresses his thoughts on the money-mindedness of the people. He states that they don't attach importance to spiritual values in this materialistic world. He cites the example Phoenician merchant whose name was Phlebas. He was a vulgar trader who always goes on thinking about profit and loss, pleasure and sense. He started for his voyage and drowned in the water of lemon. He expresses grief over the death of Phlebas who died without spiritual achievement. The fifth section of The Waste Land is What The Thunder Said! In the opening lines, the poet refers to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. One night the soldiers came to the garden of Christ to arrest him. The torch lights fell on the faces of Christ's disciples and Jesus was arrested by Judas and he was crucified. There was a great clamour of thunder over the distant mountains. It was the proclamation of his Resurrection. But now the teachings of Christ are dead in this waste land. The Christians have little faith in God and Christianity so they are spiritually dead. The theme of rebirth and resurrection, which is associated with baptism, is further exemplified in the concluding section of the poem. We find a ray of hope in:

After realizing the wisdom of the oracular utterance of the thunder-Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata comes the benediction: Shantih, Shantih, Shantih. The poet believes that man's salvation is possible if each individual looks after his own salvation. The shores of sunken river Ganga enable us to hear the oracular utterances of the thunder in the following lines:

Waited for rain, while the black cloud
Gathered for distant, over Himavant The
Jungle crouched, humped in silenceThen
spoke the thunder.

(The Waste Land, lines, 395-399)

Thus, The Waste Land may be said to be the turning point in the literary career of T.S. Eliot. The influence of this poem has been very great and it has drawn the attention of modern man. The poem is indeed the most popular single poem, which is considered one of the most important documents of the 20th century.

References-

1. Daiches David: A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II, Supernova publishers, New Delhi, 2018.
2. Edward Albert: A History of English Literature: New Delhi: oxford University Press, 2004.
3. Jyoti Prakash Sen: The Progress of T. S. Eliot as a poet and Critic: W.H. Patwardhan: orient Longman Ltd. New Delhi, 1971.
4. T.S. Eliot: The waste Land and Other Poems: Faber and Faber Limited, Queen Squire, London, 1972.
5. W. H. Hudson: An Outline of English Literature: New Delhi: AITBS Publishers & Distributors, 2003.

कृपाकटाक्षधोरणी निसृद्धदुर्धरापदि वदचिद्विगम्बरे मनोविनोदमेतु वस्तुनि।