



ELIOT'S WASTE LAND: A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE OF MODERN WORLD MORAL CRISIS

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Article Info:

Article Received:12/05/2015

Revised on:21/05/2015

Accepted on:14/06/2015

ABSTRACT

Literature written in past or present, it has always worked as a mirror. So it's very truly said that literature is the transcript of society. One can have a glimpse of any nation's cultural, historical and political conditions just by reading the text of that time and place. It's the written text which gives permanency to everything in this world. Eliot voices the predicament and futility of modern existence through his poem. It presents a true picture of rottenness growing inside modern human being. Compromises done with morals and rules just for the sake of momentarily pleasures are very well illustrated in it. The decayed and degraded moral of the mankind is the main concern of *The Wasteland*. This paper is a humble attempt to analyze the demoralized and debased human values presented in the poem.

Keywords- Materialistic, The Wasteland, Demoralized, Predicament

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T.S.Eliot has very accurately portrayed materialistic and demoralized world in his poem *The Waste Land*. It shows how men's desire to gain wealth, his unquenchable love for materialistic things and the unending struggle for power and financial dissatisfaction is gaining a mighty status. He has forgotten all about moral values and relegated his position from that great chain of being. Hunger for food is God made, but hunger for materialistic things is just like baseless pot which is always empty. One keeps on trying to fill it but will never succeed.

The Wasteland, major work of the 20th century written after the First World War in true sense describes the present debased mess that Eliot considered modern culture comprised of. Published in 1922, it presents a very bleak picture of modern life. At first the poem was named as "He do the

police in different voices" but later on Eliot switched on to the present title suggested to him by Jessie Watson's work *From Ritual to Romance*. There is a sense of disillusionment born of despair and pessimism in the poem. Eliot has described the modern world through the symbolic wasteland where life has become very blunt and ponderous just like Dante's *Inferno*. Divided into five sections it presents modern situation through different allusions.

Eliot in the section "The Burial of the dead" compares modern man with plants of the winter season that appears lifeless and dull. Winter season benumbed and turned human beings robotic. Herbs and shrubs rejuvenate on the arrival of spring but humanity like a dead man still sleeps. Sleep is the remedy to escape from things that perturbs ones

awaken mind. A sort of repression as Freud called it in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. Similarly writing worked for the writer as a medium to unleash the mental pressures. Eliot himself quotes in the poem, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430), a sort of displacement. His personal and social life's impact is clearly visible in the imagery that he has presented in the poem. All his emotions that were buried got stirred by the sudden spring rain and forced him to think about the glorious past of unadulterated love and true relations that have now all gone dull:

...breeding lilacs out of the dead land,
mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

Contemporary scenario is depicted very miserable and painful in the poem. According to the poet, mankind is lost in increasing wealth and power. They are not at all conscious about their souls lacking spiritualism. Morality and faith in God, the keystone of humanity have lost its hold on man. Its absence has caused man to stumble in a way trees do in an eroded land. Land and humanity has become entirely barren and lifeless, "I had not thought death had undone so many" (63). All stony rubbish is visible. No peace.

It is man's nature to do mistake as he is, "Son of man" (20). He is the son of Adam, who also made mistakes by disobeying God. "Fixed his eyes before his feet" (65) he is unable to see heavenly soul that is buried beneath the mundane self. Our forefathers were real human beings because they lived life in a selfless way. They had that spiritual light inside that showed them the right path. Their souls were pure and morals were alive. Eliot compare lives of our forefathers with the modern man and says, "he who was living is now dead, we who are living are dying" (328-29). On the other side modern man's heart has corrupted and decayed with darkness and ignorance. He cannot differentiate between right and wrong. He has become stone-hearted, merciless and left generosity, the main attribute of mankind. Materialism has captured him entirely. His soul is dead and buried under the effect of sensuousness and materialism. Only way of coming out from such a devastating situation is faith in the almighty God.

He can only save ones soul from destruction and provide shelter:

A heap of broken images, where the sun
beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the
cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,...
(22-25)

Then there is another scene where a fortune teller is predicting future of Tiresias. This conversation depicts the modern man's plight in a symbolic way. Tiresias represents modern man. She (fortune teller) is depicting the condition of Phoenician sailor to Tiresias, who is drowned just because of his greed. He was warned by Gull (a bird), a symbolic representation of the voice of god. It cried and requested sailor to not enter the sea of materialism but he was busy in calculating his profit and loss. His eyes glittered like pearls in the hope of acquiring a lot of wealth. He entered into the worldly ocean and was lost in the strong materialistic waves. One's earthly desire never ends and pursuing it is a useless struggle. One will be drowned in this materialistic sea if not taken the right path and awaken the slept conscience.

Love that has remained a matter of devotion has become a medium just to fulfill ones carnal desires. This is very well depicted in "The Game of chess" and "The Fire Sermon". Physical beauty is given more importance than inner beauty. Man and woman relationship has become a means for fulfilling sexual desire that is depicted in the following lines:

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defense;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(239-42)

Earlier they were considered a part of each other. They together make the whole. Now marital institution has lost its sanctity and reduced to a mere futile physical game. Hollowness has crept into this relationship:

She turns a looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;

Her brain allows one half-formed thought
to pass;

'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's
over'. (249-53)

This ugly aspect of man-woman relationship is a cause of serious evil in the society now a day. Various crimes committed against women prove the point.

Machines have replaced human beings in other words man is acting like a machine. Harmony, peace and stability are lost. This pessimistic approach is clearly visible in the poem's epigraph, where Sibyl (a woman with prophetic powers who ages, but never dies) looks at the future and wish to die. She asked Apollo to give her as many years as the grains of sand in her hand, but in her excitement she forgot to ask for youth. This made her life miserable for she withered day by day. Condition of Sibyl and man is very much akin for both desired a lot but forget its stake. Modern suspended life represents death-in-life.

In section "Death by water" poet says that psychic serene and possibility of the purification of soul lay in ones hand. Just like Lord Buddha and St. Augustine, one should become ascetic to gain satisfaction in life. When one lives such a life, it won't be trapped in this worldly web. Modernity has brought a lot of ill consequences and one of them is materialism. Money has made man's life easier but not peaceful. Peace had prevailed on the earth if it had that power. In fact, one can only buy materialistic products with it to make life comfortable and at ease. According to the poet, awareness of such conditions and no reaction against it is the root cause of mental destabilization. Modern man's conscience has slept and absurdity is prevailing in human life. Just like the Phoenician sailor, man is busy in fulfilling his lust. Existence of human beings in this world has become aimless and useless.

The last section "What the thunder said" presents before the reader that how these earthly passion and sensuousness in human nature are the sources of misery in human world. Eliot finds a suitable objective correlative in the Lord Buddha's Fire Sermon. Buddha said that man can achieve nirvana only when he overcomes all his materialistic

passions. These passions and desires are the root cause of grief and pain on earth. Modern world is suffering from this disease just like, "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit" (339). They are unable to shed this materialistic disease. Lord Buddha, born in a royal family with all services available to him left all such materialistic longings for he knew they were all temporary and "Nirvana" the ultimate truth & reality. This is what one must seek in its life. Eliot was a great admirer of Lord Buddha's teaching and that is what he talks about in the poem.

The last line of the poem is the center of attraction. *Da, Da, Da, (datta, dayadhavam, damyata)* - these three words means "Give, Sympathies, Control", respectively. They have been taken from *Brihadaranyake Upanishad*. These words were told by Prajapati to his three types of disciples'; gods, men and demons. He asks them to follow these words in order to lead a meaningful and peaceful life. Poet's intention to introduce these words in his text was to show the righteous path to the mankind.

The initial *da* implies "Datta" that means feeling of charity. Poet questioned man's selfish attitude towards the benevolent nature. Human selfishness is the real cause of misery on earth. To grow, one should think in a humanistic manner and widen its heart just like the mother nature.

Second word *da* taken by the poet from the same source is "Dayadhavam" which implies Sympathy. Poet regards contemporary society to have become completely egoist and is busy in nurturing its ego. If one wants to achieve inner peace, it has to come out of this prison. Prison of selfishness or egoism can only be broken with the help of sympathy or compassion. Our conscience is pricking us again and again to amend our way of lives. But our ears are unable to hear it as they are attracted towards the worldly sounds:

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison (412-13)

Lastly the third *da* means "Damyata" that denotes Self-control. One's life should be under its control. Moral power can help to cross over this materialistic world. One should become a master of

its desire and not a slave. Fears and risk will disappear automatically:

The Wasteland, after leading us through all the rigor and nausea of a modern wilderness, shows us in the last section that it has all been part of the journey to a definite goal, the chapel perilous, where the Holy Grail is to be found. In other words, by braving dangers, looking evil in the face and toiling onwards, regeneration may perhaps be attained. Life must be an ascetic discipline, akin to the mystic discipline of the east. (Mundhra 75)

Therefore the poet says in the poem:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME (168-69)

This is a poet's clarion call for the entire human races otherwise the consequences will be disastrous.

Eliot very well delineated the detrimental impact of modernization on society in this poem. Imagery and symbolism used in the poem are a concrete representation of his abstract thoughts. Mythology plays important role in the poetry. It also provides the solution through which man can achieve salvation and a path leading to illumination. Thematic elusiveness and linguistic obscurity very well parallels with the chaotic modern time and holds a universal appeal.

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