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THE WASTE LAND: RELEVANCE IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: From Eliot's exploration of the waste land we see, as we could not see before, the depths of its being. The new insight and understanding offer a hope of release from the prevailing desiccation. T. S. Eliot's concern for humanity is clear from his poem The Wasteland. His sadness is clearly reflected in his various works. According to Eliot it is the duty of a writer to portray the real situation of his society. In these words lies the clue to the identity of Eliot's mind and art. Eliot accepts the religious, moral, cultural and emotional crisis of our time. He is a strict puritan, who cannot tolerate any kind of laxity in the moral behaviour of the society. He is not satisfied with the way of mankind. He believes that man has to play a vital role in this universe for seeking the salvation of his soul-he has to affirm the spiritual values and to discipline the soul.

Index Terms - Wasteland, humanity, desiccation, moral, spiritual values, salvation.

It is very painful to note that the outcome of the Renaissance ethos was contrary to what the humanists had expected; their belief in human perfectibility made them too much optimistic of the future and proud of their wisdom. But what could they gain? Frustration of hopes and distortion of values. And what did the modern generations have inherited from them? They have now become conscious of the fact that they have been deceived by the illusory optimism of the Renaissance humanists.

Running after the materialistic pursuits, we withdraw ourselves from the nature and spiritual values considering ourselves great and believe as ourselves as masters of this universe. No doubt, we have controlled nature with the help of science and technology but in return made our life artificial, comfortable but miserable. We are continuously making our life comfortable but it is short of spiritualism. We never think of spiritual upliftment while making our nation strong. We know all the ways which lead to carnal desires but forget the way to the temple. In this way, we evade the basic issue of life, the question of belief and endeavour to better the lot of humanity without any awareness of ultimate goal in life. We have neglected our moral and spiritual duties.

Even The noble works of saints are no longer bothered and we are ready to give rational explanation for everything. We show no concern for human beings whose hearts are empty for want of our love and affection for them. In this way, while living just for the sake of making our material life successful and happy, we are neglecting our moral and spiritual duties. In our efforts to gain knowledge of the world, we are forgetting our spiritual existence.

However, for making our life meaningful some kind of belief is necessary to interpret and understand the mysteries of life. In other words we can say belief is that by which one lives. It is a part of human nature to live by some convictions which are the concretized formula of belief. Even an atheist, whom a religionist would call an unbeliever or a man without belief, has a pattern of belief based on some sort of philosophy.

The importance of moral and spiritual realization has increased today when our mind is assailed by doubt and despair, disbelief and unbelief. In earlier times people have faith in God, moral and spiritual values for any inspiration and upliftment in their life. But now everything has taken a turn. Nowadays there is no respect for elderly people. Nobody has time for them. Today money and position has taken a driver seat over character.

We believe in artificiality and it has resulted in mental disturbance of modern people as evident at the time of Covid pandemic. Doubt, despair, fear of death, question of survival has forced today's generation to think for the cause of this and try to overcome this feeling of uncertainty. People realized the value of joint families, feeling of brotherhood, importance of nature and belief in human relationship over the fashion of nuclear families.

There are no emotions for the members of families and the community at large results in loneliness and frustration. Our ego is main barrier in maintaining human relationship. T. S. Eliot presented the same thing in his poem with the comparison of past and present. In this way, T. S. Eliot's poetry is not subjective but has universal appeal. No doubt, contemporary experience constitutes part of the raw material of his art; but he sees beyond contemporaneity. The presence of a direct relation between the modern sense of crisis and his poetry is apparent on a superficial analysis. In his poetry and dramas we have a number of major characters who seem to betray the contemporary crisis. But we must be careful to distinguish between a tragic view of life and a superficial sense of disillusionment.

Any newspaper columnist will tell us that the huge death toll during pandemic at various parts of the world, disastrous economic fallout has increased the fear and anxiety of modern man. T. S. Eliot reflected the same fear and anxiety of modern man while giving the account of two world wars. But the fundamental forces of disintegration are forgotten or ignored and symptoms are mistaken for causes. Modern anxiety is not the end product of the disequilibrium of modern life but the latter is caused by the former. This type of problem is addressed in writers like W. B. Yeats and James Joyce. Moreover, Eliot found vitality and vigour in Shakespeare, the Metaphysical poets and the Jacobean playwrights. If we talk of Eliot then we will see that man's search for meaning in life is important and this has become the philosophy of Eliot which can be seen in any of his literary work, be it drama, poetry, critical essays etc.

Eliot's attitude to life has always been religious. In examining and criticizing the ideas and ideologies of the twentieth century, he adopts a definite anti-secularist position. Eliot talked in *The Waste Land* that after world war, the world is full of destruction, death and bloodshed but what is more disappointing for him is the spiritual dryness and emotional emptiness. To elaborate his point he has used allusions, myths, religion and references from literature of Greece, Egypt and India. Eliot regrets our failure to maintain the ancient belief in the value-orientation beyond the self, which has turned us all into lonely creatures lost in self-gratifying pursuits of wealth and sex. The whole world has become a waste land.

However, from the above discussion, we should not infer that Eliot nostalgically idealizes the past as Cleanth Brooks, Stephen Spender, James Carcallen and David Daiches have suggested. The misconception about *The Waste Land*, mirroring "the squalor of the modern against those evoking the coherent greatness of the past," arises due to the setting of the poem which is full of the scenes of modern urban squalor. But how can we lose sight of the evils in man in the past? Tereus's sexual perversity and the flirtation of Elizabeth with Leicester, read together with the seduction of the Thames daughters, suggest that evil is eternally present in human life. Yet we cannot deny that there is a remarkable difference between the past and the present.

Now Philomels are not metamorphosed into nightingales to sing their heart's agony; they passively surrender themselves to the modern Tereuses. Many critics of the twenties saw in its projection of the disillusionment of the post-war Europe. Eliot's irritation at such criticism is natural. Actually the problems raised in the poem are eternal questions pertaining to the clash between evil and good, between belief and disbelief and thus it has a universal appeal. The introduction of Tiresias is necessary to provide universality to the poem. Tiresias though not having eyes but he can perceive the crystal clear picture of destruction and unhappiness. The words he spoke in the poem were a kind of warning to modern people of all ages.

He does not have eyes but in his mind he has clear picture of the plague with which Thebes is afflicted. The words of Tiresias addressed to Oedipus sound a note of warning to all the waste landers of all ages. T. S Eliot has talked about aimless life in *The Waste Land*. He has explained human experiences in the past and the present and depicted the difference in the outcome. In the past, reformation was possible but in the present there is no chance of reform as is clear from the example of Philomela and nightingale. He has given the example of three daughters of river Thames but at the same time warning is given and a ray of hope is also shown for betterment in present by following spiritual ways of life.

We find that Eliot is not a pessimist, like a true writer; first of all he presents the problems in their real nature and then tries to give any possible solution. To make fertile this barren land of the modern world, Eliot gives us some instructions. Eliot believed in conviction that destruction is essential for enjoying the beautiful side of life. In broader terms it can be said that after destruction of material as well spiritual a new kind of foundation that will be spiritual in nature will be required. In search of this new foundation the poet turns from Western civilization to the civilization of India.

The history of every country or civilization, tells about the spiritual downfall. The poet has already given the example of the successful march of the Knight to the Chapel Perilous. Now he has turned for another example from the story of Hindu culture. At one time the river Ganges had achieved a lower water which only indicated a spiritual decline. It is described in Hindu Upanishads that at the time of crises all pray to God to show them path. God helped them but uttering the Da, Da, Da three times. Now all demons, men and Gods try to interpret it. According to man Da is 'Datta' i.e. Give. Demons said "Da" which means "Dayadhavm" which means to "sympathise." Further the gods said "Da" which means "Damyata" i.e. "Control". According to Eliot, all the three show the path of salvation for humanity, because man has all the three qualities i.e. human, demonic and angelic. Eliot calls these three virtues as the three categorical imperatives which are necessary for the survival of humanity.

The first "Da" means "to give". Eliot asks "What have we to give?" have we given ourselves away? Are we committed to a certain way of life? What have we contributed for our survival?" "Give" does not mean charity of money for the relief of the poor. It means giving oneself to a bigger purpose in life through spiritualism. It has been the inspiration for all movements of reform. Great men have given their lives for the cause which they held dear. Men are remembered not for their assets and wealth or by their legacies or wills, or by the references in the newspaper, but what they have contributed to the good of the community as a whole. Such things will not be shown in any obituary note or in the will and testament or in the inscription over the grave.

Like a boat in a calm sea', man should respond to the call of the sailor-God and surrender himself to His expert, controlling hands, which may sail him across the sea of life. That is, man should shed his fondness for individual freedom, his desires and aspirations should be in harmony with the ideals of the community and his actions should be guided by moral principles. It all involves belief in positive values which would eradicate all doubt and despair and assure a transformation of uncertainty into faith, of human weakness into reliance on supernatural omnipotence.

Eliot feels that for a modern man, who is engaged in the greedy world the path of spirituality and morality is very difficult to follow as his mind is overpowered by doubts. Eliot is quite optimistic about the modern men that they will also be able to regain their self through suffering and remorse like their ancestors. He believes that by obeying the triple commands of the Prajapati, i. e. Give, Sympathize and Control, man can rehabilitate

his lost grandeur. The poem ends with a ray of hope to modern men through resurgence. So we can say the poem is a lesson to twenty first century people.

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