

Reflections on Indian Mysticism on T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land

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Structured Abstract

Purpose: 20th century English literature was richly affected by the process of cultural globalization, that is, a mode of transnational transaction in the sphere of literature, religion, culture, emotions and so on. The great literary frontiers of then era stepped in to adapt diverse ideologies, thoughts, religious beliefs and philosophical truths oh different nations all over the world. Keeping with this trend renowned English authors showed their skill to embrace a lot of Indian mystical phenomena like Buddhism, Upanishadism, Vedantism et al and ventured to reflect the impact of those divine concepts upon their immortal creations.

Approach: post-modernistic viewpoint.

Findings: This paper focuses on Eliot's endeavour of cosmic cultural integration.

Value: The value of this article traces its attempt to retrospect the ancient cultural heritage of India that attracts the attention of the foreigners throughout the ages.

Key-words: Cultural globalization, Transnational transactions, International integration, cosmic, Mystical

Paper type: Scholarly Article

Introduction

The precept of Globalisation reached the arena of modernist literature of 20th century crossing the field of commerce and trade. One of the salient feature of cosmopolitanism is the power of assimilation and of the world literature it was remarkably observed in the English literature. Diverse languages, religions, cultures and ideologies of different countries were finely interwoven in the web of different genres of English literature. Miscellaneous sorts of philosophical truths and ideals were harmoniously integrated in the form of literature, thereby adorning that literary piece with a unified form, a proper specimen of global literature. Nowhere in the world literature so powerful influence of thoughts abroad can be seen as it is noted in English literature. The intellectuals of the 20th century, basically the writers, were completely disillusioned after the hecatomb of First World War. Accordingly, they were moved by a strong sense of frustration that led them to be reactive with a radical distrust towards so-called hackneyed materialistic view. An incoherence in all the layers of society inflicted pain upon them. Their aspiration after a coherent ambience was almost in darkness; Meanwhile few optimistic writers dreamt of a remedy that, they felt, might rid them of of that chaotic nightmarish vision. They resolved vigorously to make up their to make up their spiritual vacuity for the rejuvenation of the rotten civilization. Thus, they would like to get back the ideal world of complete universal uniformity. Hence for the attainment of that craved society they dived deeper into the well of religiosity. Regarding this, they crossed the boundary of their own nation being enticed by the oriental resources of spiritualism.

Literary Review

Eliot's quest for a peaceful world can be achieved, he himself envisaged, by unlocking the treasure trove of Indian philosophy. He delves deeper into the mine of the rich appreciated in terms of his penchant for spiritual elevation urgently needed for relieving the damned souls of 20th century.

The several articles connecting the same issue are discussed below:

The article T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land through the Prism of Indian Philosophy (IJELLH vol. 6, issue 12, Dec.2018 ISSN-2321-7065) by Dr. Rakesh Kumar and Mridu Sharma explores Eliot's deep-rooted faith in Indian Philosophy potential of healing the contemporary predicament of which his fellows are victim of.

The article Influence of Sanskrit in T. S. Eliot -Wasteland (AMIERJ ISSN-2278-5655, Impact factor 5.18, Dec-Jan 2018) by Dr. Seemem Mahmood focuses on Eliot's preoccupation with an intellectual comprehension in Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit language that empowered him to transcend himself from narrow nationalistic feelings making 'an internationalist by philosophical outlook upon life'.

The Voices of the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishad in T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land by Sonia Chumber (IJIL, vol.2, no.3, Sep. 2014, ISSN-2334-234X conceptualizes Eliot's inclination towards Hindu scriptures like Geeta and Upanishad as master guide in the path of obtaining peace thereby conveying the message of harmony at the end implying its cosmic value.

Now this present article retains its uniqueness concentrating mainly on the fact that Eliot's orientation in the significance of Indian mysticism that reworks in shaping his ideology and its recapitulation in the literature abroad promoting the process of cultural globalization. Through this poem Eliot's meditation upon Indian philosophy a macrocosmic purpose of exchanging its ubiquity thereby abridging the cultural gulf between East and West.

Objectives

The objective of this article concerns the intense impact of Oriental mystical issues on modern English literature and specifically upon the great scholar critic T.S. Eliot's masterpiece The Waste Land.

Hypotheses

It is quite apparent that of the oriental countries India was conceived as a shrine for the occidental pilgrims from remote past. This is due to its rich tradition of spiritualism. It was the epi-centre of cultural studies where historic books as the great Vedas and Upanishads were designed. Along with those myths and scriptures religions like Hinduism, Buddhism originated and gradually got established all over the world. Relevantly speaking, few western thinkers and writers of the 20th century lay stress on those spiritual phenomena to remove the emotional and intellectual despair, spiritual malaise as well as moral decay in which the urban was entrapped after the massacre of World War I. In England such writers as T.S. Eliot, Charles Morgan, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Isherwood, Mayers, Somerset Maugham were influenced to hanker after Indian Spiritualism for guidance and substance in their writing. Of them, our focus is on T. S. Eliot. He was the pioneer who penetrated into the

mine of Indian mystical notions and presented them in his extraordinary poem *The Waste Land* (1922).

Delimitation

The presence of pre-colonial philosophical notions of India in post-colonial western productivity can positively be taken into account as a bridge between us-other binary. It enhances the possibility of globalization to a greater extent.

Methodology

Recurrent usages of intertextual annotations, the fragmentary structure and self-reflexive tone categorise this accomplishment to be judged from post-modernistic viewpoint.

Discussion

In this poem the great poet critic sketches a vivid portrayal of the 'Unreal City' of London and other similar urban towns in modern Europe. Throughout the entire poem the poet presents the waste land scenario that reveals the social disorder, ethical drought and spiritual dryness frequently using symbols and 'a heap of broken images', as Eliot himself termed it. A truly compelling portrait of modern man's drab life has been delineated in the images of dead land, dusty streets, dead trees, desert rocks, dry stone, empty cisterns, exhausted wells, rats scurrying sewers et al. The poet skillfully alluded to various ancient legends and myths cosmopolitan outlook to poetise the fragmented post-war picture. This device enables Eliot to make a bridge between past and present, presenting before the reader how much meaningless is the void ultramodern civilization. A sense of disintegration and barrenness hovers almost everywhere in the poem. The five episodic parts of the poem, say, i. The Burial of the Dead, ii. A Game of Chess, iii. The Fire Sermon, iv. Death by Water, v. What the Thunder Said are very functional to project the view of that desolate and gloomy landscape. Hence, Eliot masterfully incorporates in the poem diverse geographic and historic locales and regions and a vast array of mythic or real figures giving it timeless relevance with utmost universal significance.

In keeping with his cosmopolitan nature, Eliot characteristically exhibits his dominance over different cultures and religions in this poem. He, therefore, makes here an extensive use of scriptural writings including the Bible, the Book of Prayer, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Buddha's Fire Sermon, cultural and anthropological studies like Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Another sign of Eliot's global outlook

has been evoked in his use of phrases from English, German, French, Italian, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit languages everywhere in the poem.

Eliot's genius cannot but allude to the blind prophet Tiresias of Greek legend as the most important personage of the poem, the legend of Fisher King, the Sibyl of Cumae, indirect reference to the queen Cleopatra of ancient Egypt and queen Elizabethan of England. Apart from this, Eliot recalls two religious visionaries – Lord Buddha and St. Augustine, one from Indian saga and other from Christian lore. In part v, the poet brings in the Christ figure and brief mentioning of prophet John, the Baptist and Moses (Book of Exodus) and Grail of Christ. Again, he closes the poem calling up the Hindu pantheon of ancient Vedic times in India- Prajapati, Men, Devas and Asuras. All those mythical and legendary citations are instrumental testimonies approving Eliot's propensity of acquiring universal acknowledgement of his work. So, like a master craftsman he spontaneously shifts his focus from occident to orient and vice-versa.

Now the targeted concern of this paper is to illuminate upon Eliot's religious proposition, particularly the powerful influence of Indian spiritual properties on this great poet. He skillfully alluded to his Indian mystical experiences as a way out from western spiritual degradation and sexual perversion. It has been clearly poetized in section iii and under the title *The Fire Sermon* and *What the Thunder Said* respectively.

The caption of the third part *The Fire Sermon* has been taken from *Adittapriyay Sutta* (S.N.35) and has been translated from Pali by Bhikkhu Thanissaro. It shows the poet's intimate and scholastic association with Buddhist philosophy. In the *Vinaya*, that is Buddhist monastic code, the *Fire Sermon* is the third discourse delivered by Lord Buddha. Several months after his Awakening Buddha delivers this sermon to an audience of thousand fire-worshipping monks. In his excellent teaching style, Buddha uses a metaphor of fire to instruct his disciples. Upon hearing this sermon, the ascetics attains full Awakening (arahatta) and get released from sufferings and turmoil. One of the renowned western scholars of Buddhist studies was late Henry Clarke Warren who wrote *Buddhism in Translation* (Harvard Oriental Series) that might be a reliable source for those words that occur in the Buddha's *Fire Sermon* corresponding in importance to the *Sermon on the Mount*. In this sermon, Buddha advocates his followers that everything 'is on fire...The eye... is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire; impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent, originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, that also is on fire.

And with what are these on fire? With the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation.” However, Eliot covertly refers to this eastern ascetic, the great preacher of Buddhism with much relevance as he hopes for a potential civilized society. The plethora of vulgar sexual encounters described in the poem have not proved very successful to bring fertility in the barren land. The Lord Buddha instructs his disciples to give up earthly passion and seek freedom from earthly possession. The ideal of non-attachment formulated by Buddha is the heart of Buddhist philosophy and the very soul of Hinduism also. Eliot concludes this section with the word ‘burning’ in accordance with his ascetic turn to Indian mysticism. Being exasperated, the poet appeals to God to elevate him as well as his fellow citizens into the transcendental world saving from the affliction of burning lust:

“ O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

Burning.” (The Waste Land, line 309)

Again, the meditation structure of the final section entitled as *What the Thunder Said* is drawn on Eliot's close proximity with Indian philosophy and religion. These stanzas look forward to the poet's sage like apocalyptic vision. At the beginning of this part, he makes reference to the Christ's Crucifixion like a devout Christian. In Eliot's own words:

“ He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying.”

What he intends to imply here is the sad predicament of the waste landers who are exiled in the ‘arid plain’ living death-in-life existence. As a believer of Hindu fables, he deliberately shifts his focus to Hinduism from Christianity. Eliot's orientation in Indian Spirituality gets distinctly revealed as he takes the title of this section from Upanishad; the key-word of which is as follows: God made the senses turn outwards, not within himself. But occasionally a daring soul, desiring immortality, has looked back and found himself. Despite the dreadful corruption of the European society, the poet retains his faith upon eastern philosophy which he believes, could be able to provide an alternative for the resurrection of humanity. The physical sterility, elaborated by him throughout the poem, can only be replaced, in his view, by removing spiritual sterility prevailing in the then society. To highlight his stance, he closes the poem with this section where water comes in the form rain to refresh the dry barren land, thereby bringing

fecundity in the troubled soul. In this stanzas the poet is seen to brood over the morals set in Upanishad for regaining the coherent ethos. For this reason, in the reverberation of thunder, he recalls the voice of Prajapati Brahma instructing his three classes of offspring the lesson of realizing the essence of life. This is, it seems to me, a substantial vindication of the poet's close acquaintance with Hindu myth upon which he deliberately illustrate to alleviate the modern man's agonized heart. For his deep understanding of the fundamental doctrines propounded in Upanishad, Eliot alluded to the syllable 'DA' in the sound of rumbling thunder. The explanation of the fable regarding 'DA' can be found in the part v, ch-ii of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (meaning forest of great wilderness) to preach the message of humanity. A translation has been mentioned in Paul Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda, (1897) p-489*. The fable runs like this: once Prajapati Brahma, the Creator of beings was asked by his students, better to say, three distinguished types of progeny- Devas, Manusyas and Asuras some instructions to lead a disciplined life after completing their studies in Brahmacharya (celibacy). So, he first calls the divine beings advising them to follow 'DA'. The Lord wanted to know if they understood the meaning of 'DA'. They answered that it meant " Damayata" or practice of self-restraint. It has been told in Hindu mythology that Devas or angels are the most pleasure-seekers of all these three types and therefore, they took the meaning of this message as to control their luxurious nature. He repeated the same syllable 'DA' for human beings. They apprehended 'Datta' or give by this utterance. By nature, men are miserly in sharing wealth. So, their conscience told them to be charitable. Again, Brahma pronounced the syllable 'DA' for demons who are relentlessly cruel. So, they learned to practice "Dayavata" or be merciful to other entities.

These three cardinal virtues- temperance, charity and compassion for life- recommended by the vedic seers cast a profound impact upon the poet Eliot after 3,000 years of their existence. The terrifying vision of spiritual drought that thwarts survival of human beings haunts the poet to prophesize the means of their salvation and this is why he alluded to the Upanishad quite significantly. Herein lies the dexterity of the poet. The rumbling thunder here, stands for the poet's mouthpiece echoing DA sound in the deserted atmosphere. Taking cue from Upanishad Eliot applied the age-old fable in to the modern man's spiritual degeneration in his poem:

'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''

Those quoted lines expound how the poet attempts to alert the so-called civilized perverted fellows.

What Prajapati Brahma taught His three types of students respectively, our ascetic-poet declared for all men in general. The reason is quite distinct; we, the human beings, are incarnation of both good and evil spirit. Sometimes, divinity overpowers us and sometimes bovine nature controls our self. Again, we are led by our man-like egoism or selfishness. So, the poet emphasizes on this mythical instruction for all human beings who embody gods, demons as well as manly self within. Through the above-mentioned lines Eliot exhorts mankind to sacrifice lives completely to some noble cause of humanity, to sympathize each one as they are imprisoned in the waste land and to control the self when it becomes derailed. Though '' London Bridge is falling down'', the poet seems to envisage the possibility of regeneration:

'' I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?''

The poet is heard to enchant the 'Shantih' mantra at the end of the poem and this is, perhaps, the poet's final attempt to set the confusing world in a unified coherent pattern. To repeat the word 'Shantih' (meaning, 'The peace which passeth understanding') he uses Sanskrit language what he does to refer the connotations of syllable 'DA'. So. There is no denying the fact that Eliot, the scholar-critic of modernist literature, stepped in to Hindu mythology, the great Upanishads, particularly Brihadaranyaka Upanishads where he gets the knowledge of Pavamana Mantra (1.3.28):

‘‘ Asato ma Sadgomay
Tamoso ma jyotirgomay
Mrtyorma amrtm gamay
Om Santih Santih Santih’’

The English translation of this Sanskrit sloka is the following:

‘‘ From untruth, lead me to the truth;
From darkness, lead me to the light;
From death, lead me to immortality;
Om peace, peace, peace.’’

Conclusion

To sum up, I should say, this paper shows a humble endeavour to present the influence of Indian mystical notions upon the poetic career of T. S. Eliot. At the same time, I have tried to focus on the opulent resources of spiritualism of India in Vedic era with special reference to Eliot's The Waste Land and how it has made a cultural blend of orient and occident, thereby encouraging the process of globalisation.

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