

THE WASTE LAND: ELIOT'S SEARCH FOR 'SANTIH'

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Abstract

Eliot is quite different from any other modern English poet and is held as the most influential literary person of 20th century not only for his uniqueness in his style and subject matter of his poetry but it is the use of oriental philosophy which is the most stunning feature in his poems. Though Eliot being a Christian himself, he studied rigorously Hindu scriptures and the influence of Vedas and Hindu philosophy was deep rooted in him. In this paper I have tried to search the logics for such alien affinity and other concealed motifs of Eliot which is evident in his poetry.

The fancy and imagination of a poet's psyche always gets affected by the prevailing social world. T.S. Eliot in no way was different in his writing his poems. Being a staunch modernist himself, Eliot's poetry has always portrayed the crude, harsh war-torn world, where humanity has reached the zenith of its sterility. The poem *Wasteland*, probably the finest work of Eliot deals with these problems of modern war-torn world. The title itself suggests that this modern world is nothing but wasteland where everything is sterile, unfertile and unproductive and the inhabitants of this world is suffering from physical and mental paralysis and sterility. The poem through different sections presents us different voices suffering from physical and mental sterility. The different consciousness presented through such characters and episodes like Madame Sosostris, Sibyl of Cumae, The Hayacinth garden episode, Tiresius are actually the different perceptions of a single consciousness, which is of the poet himself. As the present topic demands, let us now directly move towards the last section of the poem, 'What the thunder Said'. In a letter to Bertrand Russell, Eliot wrote himself that this part was 'not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all'. It is to be noted here that the cacophony of different voices get united in a new unified voice of 'we', a voice which is secular and universal. The earlier sections of *Wasteland* dramatized a series interlinked problems, personal, socio-cultural and historical, which would be summed up in one question: What can 'we' do to be saved from this state of sterility in our mortal world? The last section seems to present us towards some revelation or some kind of answer to the dominant question. The reference to Christ's betrayal, Passion and Crucifixion at the beginning of this section, then the hallucination in desert, along with the other images, shows the want of spiritual assistance in our modern world. The problems concerning our modern world have by now reached its climax at this point in the poem. Eliot comes out with a startling answer to the raised question, the question of salvation of humankind.

Eliot shifts the location from the unreal cities of Europe to the tropical plains of India where the sunken Ganga and withered vegetation wait for rain clouds to come and enliven them. It is after the patience has been tested adequately that the thunder speaks the word of wisdom. It says 'DA'. The reference is to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where the creator 'Prajapati' says the same word to his threefold offsprings- the gods, the humans and the demons. To each group he utters the words 'DA'. Each group interprets it differently. The humans interpret it as 'Datta' (Give); which means that we must dedicate ourselves to a worthwhile cause. The gods interpret it as 'Damayata' (self-control), which means discipline of mind is necessary for spiritual achievement. The demons interpret it as 'Dayadhvam' (to be compassionate), which means we must give our own ego and work for the good of community, which will bring spiritual satisfaction. Eliot thus means to say that through practicing of this triad, "Give, Sympathise, Control" can bring us spiritual salvation and can promise 'Santih', a peace that surpasses all suffering. Eliot has thus ended the poem with chanting of 'Santih' three times.

The word 'Santih' along with 'DA' is a startling combination with the English language used. To be able to find answers behind Eliot's use of such Vedic 'Shlokas' being a Christian himself attracts several possible logical answers. It is clearly evident from the use of the Hindu religious word, that Eliot has possibly lost his faith in his own religion and thus has shifted far away to the Vedas for a possible answer to come out of this sterility of Wasteland. The triple injunctions of the thunder appear to be invoked here to counteract the fear of madness of waste Landers and readers and to come out of it. To find more apt answers to such digression from Western culture and philosophy we need to explore the meaning of the word 'Santih' in depth. The word 'Om' is the symbol of the Hindu (Vedic religion). It is the sound of the whole cosmic manifestation. And the word 'Santih' which is chanted three times with 'Om' means peace for all humankind, peace for all living and non-living beings, peace for the universe, peace for each and everything in this whole cosmic manifestation. The words 'Santih' is uttered three times for three kinds or sufferings in this world and wish to be freed of them. First one is the 'Spiritual suffering'; the suffering of the soul and mind and those of from vices, worry, hatred, jealousy, thoughts, repentance, etc. The second kind is 'Physical suffering'; such as pains of body, illness, defective vision and other physical paralysis. The third one is the suffering by 'natural causes' such as earthquake, floods, snakebite and the likes. The word 'Santih' also means threefold peace, peace of body, speech and mind and that is peace in the entirety of one's being. Thus to find salvation or freedom from such sufferings and to achieve peace Eliot had to look beyond the European tradition to find a word of adequate depth which he found in the word 'Santih'. It is a peace that surpasses all suffering, perhaps sometimes beyond our own understanding. The invocation seems to articulate a desire rather than to affirm an achieved state. Thus Eliot has strived for a perfect secular state and thus has universalized the poem.

Now if we bifurcate such uses and motifs as they are at the ending of the poem a bit more we may easily find that the use of the word 'Santih' which in a single word can be said as 'peace' is actually the way by which Eliot wishes the modern world to be, to come out of such sterile condition and have universal peace and harmony. The poem on the other hand shows Eliot's dislike for capitalist modernity as a reaction for alienation from such traditions and a wish for an utopian turn, hinting at the possibility of a secular redemption of intolerable conditions of the then so-called modern society. The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad announces in its First Chapter the very renowned prayer which it calls Pāvamāna-Abhyaroha, meaning thereby an 'Elevated Chant'. This prayer, or recitation, is as follows: *Om asato mā sad gamaya; Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya; Mrtyor mā amritam gamaya*. The meaning of this Mantra is obvious: 'Lead me from the unreal to

the Real; Lead me from darkness to Light; Lead me from mortality to Immortality.' The prayer is supposed to be a regular meditation to enable the soul to reach the Supreme Being and Eliot did the same prayer though differently in his own way through the concluding lines in his poem. Eliot strived for the 'moksha' of the 'Hollow Men' from this 'wasteland' and perhaps the destruction of such wasteland for a new world, rather a fully changed world. Thus it would be fair to say that the wish of such Utopia is actually a wish for a 'grand narrative' which Eliot strived for to emancipate mankind and the then society. Though the search for such "grand narrative" resulted in a tour through different consciousness in the poem and ultimately ended in Vedas. Thus it will not be very wrong to say, that he secretly prayed for 'Om' (which is held as parallel to creator of all universe in Hindu theology) and wanted him to shower "santih" on the war-torn, fragmented modern world. But the question remains, whether such emancipation can really be achieved or not.

Work Cited

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