

ISSN : 2347-503X

# Research Chronicler

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol II Issue III : March 2014

**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

[www.research-chronicler.com](http://www.research-chronicler.com)

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A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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**Allusiveness in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot with special reference to *The Waste Land*****Dr. Shivaji Sargar**

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**Abstract**

The present paper is an attempt to study the allusiveness in the poetry of T.S. Eliot with special reference to *The Waste Land*. T. S. Eliot extended the scope of symbolism to include the use of Partial quotation and of allusion to create the thought or atmosphere contrast or Illumination. The paper focuses on T.S Eliot's invention of new form for poetry and how he broke tradition showing himself right ahead of modernism.

**Key Words:** Allusions, objective correlatives, self abnegation, asceticism, analogy, anomaly modernism

**Introduction**

T.S. Eliot's epoch-making poem *The Waste Land* appeared in public in 1922. It is a much discussed poem with five Movements. In it the poet has displayed the fears, doubt and distrust of the Post-war generation. It won for him the Dial award.

*The Waste Land* was the first attempt of the poet to create a major poem with a philosophical message. The poem provides a good illustration of the use of 'objective correlatives' and the great economy of words which such use can bring about. It is almost an epic in less than five hundred lines. 'It is an epic on own and on human civilization, not any particular achievements, but on the sum total of human achievements since the dawn of history to the modern times'. According to Maithiessen, the poem expresses "the agony of a society without belief."<sup>1</sup>

"In 1922 a new star became lord of the ascendant. Mr. Eliot's *Waste land* was hailed by the rising generation as a landmark

in English poetry comparable to the Lyrical Ballads."<sup>2</sup>

The title comes from Miss J. L. Weston's book, *From Ritual to Romance* which has an anthropological theme: the *Waste Land* in that work has significance in terms of Fertility Ritual. The question is What is the significance of the modern *Waste Land*? The answer may be found in "the rich disorganization of the poem. Mr. Leavis remarks that "the seeming disjointedness" of the poem is closely connected with the erudition so puzzling to the reader and with "the wealth of literary borrowing and allusions." The characteristics noted here reflect "the present state of civilization." As a result, traditions and cultures have mingled, and the historical imagination makes the past contemporary; no one tradition can digest so great a variety of materials. This naturally leads to a breakdown of forms and the irrevocable loss of that sense of absoluteness which seems necessary to a robust culture.

In *The Waste Land* we have, in addition to the 'ritualistic figures' 'Legendary myths', complex structure based on analogy and anomaly, the abrupt progression through five Movements or Sections (1) The Burial of The Dead, (2) The Game of Chess, (3) The Fire Sermon, (4) Death by Water, and (5) What the Thunder Said. Throughout the poem appears the figure of Tiresias, representing entire humanity; it is his presence that gives unity to the work.

### Allusions in *The Waste Land*

The *Waste Land* was published in 'The Criterion (London, October 1922) and in The Dial New York November 1922.) The poem in book form, with Eliot's notes, was published by Boni and Liveright in New York in 1922. The *Waste Land* has come to be recognised as a revolutionary work of art, the crowning glory of a new kind of poetry (1909-22) and the finest 'experiment, in Ezra Pound's words of the modern movement. Though *The Waste Land* in its final form consists of only 434 lines, Ezra Pound described it as the longest poem in the English Language because of its profundity, perplexity and destiny of poetic allusions, myths and meaning.

### Section-I: The Burial of the Dead

The theme of the first section, says Cleanth Brooks is the attractiveness of death or the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the *Waste Land* live.\*03 He further states that whereas The Burial of the Dead offers the general abstract statement of the situation the second part of the *Waste Land*, The theme of the death is contrasted with the idea of rebirth. In fact there are two kinds of life and two

kinds of death being projected. Life at a higher richer, spiritually elevating level is contrasted with Life at a lower level, experienced to a degree in the city of London, the Urban Waste Land of modern civilization.

The poem's first line, 'April is the cruellest month'<sup>4</sup> is an inversion of the regular poetic myth that, April is a month of warmth and joy. In the Christian calendar April is invariably associated with Easter and the resurrection of Christ. In the fertility myths spring is associated with the growth of potency in the Fisher King and with the fertility of his Land. However, these events are anticipated with fear rather than hope, and thus April seems cruel rather than kind.

The poet asks in a language resonant of Biblical echoes, his first question and the answer is cryptic and in terms of doom. The myths of the ancient world are a Death is prophesied or rather suggested: death, when Fears shall be in the way.... And desire shall fail. And man shall return into the dust from which he becomes.

"And I will show you something different from either

Your shadow of morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust."<sup>5</sup>

A Handful of dust, though it may be symbolic of death, can at the same time become fruitful soil with the help of spring rain. But whence in this *Waste Land* shall come the Life giving rain? At first we are given a vision of the desert in all its parching heat and brought then the hope or rather the yearning for relief and shade the half mocking invitation to come and find something different from the loneliness and



emptiness, and finally the grim, sardonic revelation of human reality that the shadow is giving it the shape of a man in the expression 'fear in a handful of dust.'

The linking of April with memory and desire is a curious combination. Line of The Burial of Death: You! Hypocrite Lecteur! Mon-semblable Mon ferrer! (derived from Baudelaire)<sup>6</sup>

Since Stetson could be elate or for that matter, he couldn't be everyman the References to the Planting of the corpse in the garden or to the dog who will dig it up again are part of the web of allusion to be stress in this particular context to John Webster's 'the White Devil' the song in the white devil.

Thus, The Burial of Death predominantly suggests that the death wish seems to govern. Modern civilization and that there is little and no hope of a spiritual re birth it cannot be denied that as per as the average reader concerned the poet has cluttered up the poem with so many allusions which trip the reader.

### Section-II: A Game of Chess

The transaction from the Burial of Dead' to 'A Game of Chess' is marked by an intensification of the theme of sterility and violence in sexual relationship, and concreteness in the mode of communication through symbols, allusions and images.

'A Game of Chess', derived from Middleton's play Women Beware women, unfolds also the theme of a woman's seduction. The game is used as a mode of distracting attention from the Duke's attempt at seducing the lady's daughter-in-

law. In fact, the game and the-seduction seem to progress simultaneously and the moves of the players on the chessboard are counter points of another game, the human drama of seducing the lady in the same house and at the same time. Sexual intrigue is thus shown as another dimension of the 'game of chess', which results in death and sorrow.

### Section-III: The Fire Sermon

The subtitle of this section is derived from Lord Buddha's sermon in which he calls upon his disciples and seekers after God to give up desire root' of all evil. The fires of lust must be overcome. The spirit of the Buddha's sermon, with the ideals of resignation and self-abnegation as its key ideas, is also linked with the kindred feelings of St Augustine's ideas on unholy passion. A third shade of meaning in this network of allusion is provided by St Paul's view that marriage should" be preferred to the life" of uncontrolled lust and carnal burning. Eliot attempts to bring together the two voices of eastern and western asceticism in this double allusion." This section clothes with what is probably an allusion to the words of Lord Buddha, suggesting that the world is burning with fires of passion, hatred and sexual infatuation. This Buddhist vision is supported by the confessional mood of St Augustine. 'O Lord Thou pluckest me out' is an exact repetition of St Augustine's words as he refers to Joshua, high priest, as a 'brand plucked out of the fire'.

The allusions to two important religions seem intended by Eliot to focus the reader's attention on the confluence of eastern and

western religions insofar as both uphold asceticism and self-denial.

#### Section-IV: Death by Water

‘Death by Water’ is an obvious contrast to the pre-ceding section, The Fire Sermon’. Dying here carries the suggestion of rebirth, and the possibility of resurrection is foreseen as a distinct outcome of death by Water. The lines -

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
and the profit and loss...<sup>7</sup>

are an almost exact English translation of Eliot’s poem in French entitled ‘Dans le Restaurant’.

Death by water comes as a relief after the sterility and futility of the typist-girl and the Thames daughters episodes, but the return to mortality, or the feeling of being mortal, is not far in this section either: ‘Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.’

The protagonist appears to identify himself with Phlebas and thus transcends the limitations imposed upon him by Madame Sosostris or the Tarot pack. His identification also implies a new variety of psychic experience. It is only by dying that man can hope to be re-born. In fact, this hope is essential at this stage for the protagonist to continue his quest (like that of the questing knight), and it surely paves the way to the revelation of ‘what the Thunder Said’.

#### Section V: What the Thunder Said

The title is derived from Prajapati’s voice speaking through thunder, an episode of

revelation derived from the Brihadaramjaka Upanishad.

The first part of the movement, as has been indicated by Eliot in his notes, is marked by the use of three themes: the mythical journey of the Knight through the parched land of the Fisher King to the Chapel Perilous; the journey to Emmaus in which Jesus appeared to two of his disciples on the third day after his crucifixion, and finally the aimless march of modern western civilization in the context of the decay of cultural values in a Europe which was once spiritually and culturally fertile. The opening lines describe the arrest of Jesus.

The message of the thunder gives concrete form to this hope, to the transformation of the waste land into a fertile land. Eliot uses ‘Ganga’, the pure Sanskrit word, for the great holy river, and not Ganges, the anglicized form, as He looks towards the east. ‘Hamadan’, too, is a pure Sanskrit word evoking the mythical and rich heritage of Indian culture. The story of Ganga is one of the major myths of India’s cultural past, associated with the lives of King Sagar and King Bhagirathi. Mythology has it that the holy river flowed in paradise in the mountain range of Himavant. Sagar, the King of Ayodhya, wished to perform ashwamedh-yagna (the horse sacrifice), but was dismayed to find his children dead. There was no water for the ritual washing of the dead and he, therefore, wished to bring Ganga from Himavant to the earth. His descendant, King Bhagirath, succeeded in this attempt. The Ganga flowed on the earth through Siva’s hair in mighty torrents.

Eliot describes Ganga as 'sunken' because it suggests the debased state of civilization, the shrivelled quality of man's existence. The black clouds over Himavant hold out a promise of rain and the possibility of salvation.

The induction of four Sanskrit words derived from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, and the way Eliot has adapted them to the needs of the poetic structure and philosophical meaning of the poem, deserves detailed consideration. The Waste Land projects Tiresias as the protagonist for he represents the principal point of view and the two sexes meet in him. Similarly, in Indian mythology, the two -sexes synthesize in Prajapati, a great-seer and prophet. 'DA' is the noise of thunder and embodies, in a parable, its message for mankind. The offspring of Prajapati, on completing their education, ask their father for a final message or moral revelation. Prajapati, according to the Upanishad, uttered the syllable DA to the three kinds of his disciples and children: the Devas (gods), manishyas (men) and asuras (evil spirits). Prajapati gave them the same message: DA. He later asked the devas what DA meant to them and they answered: 'Damyata' (control yourself). Then Prajapati asked the men and they answered: 'Datta (Give). The asuras answered 'Dayadhvam' (Be compassionate).

The most significant aspect of this Prajapati episode is that the word DA communicates different meanings to different individuals. It may mean either self-control or charity of compassion. Eliot therefore seems to emphasize that the individual must seek his own salvation.

Eliot also changes the order of the Upanishadic words, which is Damyata, Datta and Dayadhvam. The Upanishad stresses self-control whereas Eliot seems to give precedence to charity and compassion, which lead to self-control.

The word 'Datta' suggests a surrender, a giving in which will bring about rebirth. This surrender of the inner spirit of man to a higher cause is a great event, though it will not appear in. Obituary notices, nor in statements of wealth, nor in wills unsealed by solicitors in empty rooms. The allusion to Webster's The White Devil in the 'beneficent spider image shows that in the modern waste land giving has degenerated into mere sexual surrender, as has indeed been shown earlier in the poem. With 'Dayadhvam' man is asked to be merciful, since compassion is the true hallmark of a spiritual life, whereas modern man has become so self-centred that each one seems to create, and live in, his own prison-house.

Count Ugolino's words in Dante's Inferno (I have heard the key / Turn in the Door') are adroitly fitted into the diagnosis of modern values. The words 'Broken Coriolanus' refer to the Roman general of Shakespeare's play who, though once successful, was later banished by his countrymen and spiritually broken. He was broken also by his divided self, between his duty to the outer world and loyalty to his inner voices. He had at one time a glimpse of this 'inner reality'. Coriolanus's city, too, seemed to have been under a curse, as much as the parched land of the Fisher King, and in this way he is related to the main myth of the poem.



'Damyata' suggests that man must learn to control his heart and passions and subject them to a strict moral discipline. The heart is likened to a gay boat gliding freely on the waters, subjecting itself to expert hands, the 'controlling hands' of moral values. With the lines- I sat upon the shore / fishing with the arid plain behind me,<sup>8</sup> the protagonist merges himself with the image of the mythical Fisher King and both of them seem to speak through the poet. The protagonist, as Rober Langbaum says, thus 'becomes

both Quester and Fisher King', and in this way the 'vision of the disorder', the central theme of *The Waste Land*, is recreated.

The concluding stanza in the poem is of great thematic and symbolic significance. It is a crescendo in which all the earlier imagistic waves seem to rise to a great height. The water imagery, so basic to the structure of the poem, is recreated with great force, indirectly raising an important thematic question. Shall I at least set my lands in order?

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