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A comparative analysis of TS. Eliot's "Waste land" and post-modern world of barrenness of culture, anarchy and religious values

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Abstract

The term barrenness means the infertility of human heart, behavior, culture, life style and self-centered attitude of the people of post-modern period. For this kind of religious barrenness T.S. Eliot, W B Yeats and many other contemporary writers lamented for. Because, now we have men not mankind. We have now human being without humanity. Our world, at present, is such a world that takes pride of being the owner of destructive weapons by which millions of wretched may get crushed within seconds like Nagasaki or Hiroshima. All kinds of inhumane activities are now making valid wearing the mask of so called humanity. Thirst for power, land, lust and domination have already made our nations mad. Genocide has become a fashion of displaying one's war-power, weapon and force. The blood of human being is now cheaper than that of animals. Culture is practiced with a view to increasing snobbery. The virginity of women is broken like toys of mud of an infant. The definition of democracy has already changed into a new version. It is now of the autocrats by the autocrats and for the autocrats by sucking the lives of the commoner. So it can be said in this era, that emptiness of life, terminological chaos, futility of culture and religion is much more barren and destructive than the contemporary time of Eliot. Though we have notably many thing but nothing in real perspective.

Keywords: barrenness, thirst, genocide, snobbery, definition of democracy, autocrats, emptiness

Introduction

The sense of emptiness can be found in the poems of earlier writers also. For example, the following immortal lines can be interpreted with different context:

"Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,

Nor any drop to drink." [Quoted in Rime of the Ancient Mariner- Coleridge]

This very notion of emptiness which appeared in Rime of the Ancient Mariner is a gentle wind which signifies the concept of emptiness or nothingness in spite of possessing a lot nearest to us.

Eliot's poetry was a revolt against traditional poetry. "Waste Land" is an example of one of them in which Eliot does not mix tradition with individual emotion unlike romantic tradition. Though the first publication of the poem raised a storm of adverse criticism, it became a masterpiece later on. It was considered as a slightly related separate poems. Alec Brown in "The Scrutinies", called it "a set of shorter poems tackled together." "Time Literary Supplement" was more forthright in its criticism and said that the poem was nothing but "parodying without taste or skill." "The New Statesman" agreed with this view and added that "the parodies are cheap and the imitations inferior." In short, the poem was considered as a short scholarly nonsense, and the hope was expressed that it would be left gradually "to sink itself". But with the passage of time, the poem has been increasingly appreciated and glowing tributes have been paid to Mr. Eliot's remarkable achievement. F.R. Leavis, Matthiessen and Cleanth Brooks have gone a long way towards revealing the real meaning and significance of "The Waste Land." The dedicated research and analysis of the critics

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proves it to be regarded as a highly considered epic of modern age which truly reflects the 20th century after World War-I.

This paper will try to find out resemblance of Eliot's barrenness of the waste land of King Fisher, King Oedipus and Biblical waste land with that of the post- modern world of anarchy, infertility of religion and sexual perversion.

Textual Analysis

The poem "Waste Land" is a masterpiece of using reference, myth and symbol. It is a result of vast studies of the poet. It is one of the most talked about poems of the 20th century which was composed in 1921 in Switzerland and finally published in 1922. It is a long poem of five parts entitled (i) The Burial of the Dead (ii) A Game of Chess (iii) The Fire Sermon (iv) Death by Water

What the Thunder Said. The first part deals with the theme of spiritual death of the waste landers and the second includes the theme of sexual degeneracy in the modern age. The third part informs of us the sterile burning of lust brought out by different sex experiences in the contemporary waste land. The fourth section discusses about the function of gaining purification and spiritual regeneration of the souls of the waste landers those have become beastly in pursuit of wealth and sensuous pleasures. The last section ends with a note of hope and suggests the ways of salvation quoting from Upanishad. The protagonist of the poem is the blind prophet Tiresias from Greek mythology, the waste land of King Oedipus.

In the poem, we notice a waste land of 'Fisher King' which has a mythical background as a result of hazardous quest of Parsifal, the quester and his fellow adventurers from the book of Jessie Weston's "From Ritual to Romance". The mythical waste land of the Fisher King symbolizes contemporary decay and spiritual sterility. The sick King symbolizes the sick humanity, and this sickness results from its sexual sins. Sex which is the source of life, has been denied its proper function. It has been degraded to mere 'animal copulation'; and this sexual perversion has led to spiritual death. We are suggested that spiritual health can be regained only through penance, suffering and discipline.

Now, if we notice over the post modern age of machine and materialism, we can easily draw a vivid picture of a world spiritually barren. Our present world has been supplied all the tools of making our contemporary waste landers spiritually dead. It has become a 'Slogan' nowadays that "nobody care for no body", and nothing is considered to be greater than self-interest. Messages from religious books, may it be the Holy Quran or Bible or Upanishad, are now merely considered a collection of some pages made of papers. Love has become a fashion and a matter of animal copulation everywhere in hotel room or park, under the bush of a botanical garden, in open daylight or under open sky. Now it is to be admitted that human being has defeated animal being in case of love - making. The human, at present, are not human at all, but merely living being. The sight of sexual barrenness among soldiers during genocide is much more fatal than the normal. A three years old daughter is not safe to her contemporary hyenas. Even sisters are now seduced by brothers, daughters by fathers, maids by masters and beloved by lovers wittingly unlike King Oedipus. This is the scenario of our artificial drama of post modern period, staged on every corner of every street of the world of machine and materialism. Remedy has become essential for

this spiritual death and sexual infertility. Perhaps, the sense of loyalty and accountability to the almighty in the day of resurrection may clear away the rust from our generation by nothing else.

Next waste land, mentioned in the poem is the waste land of King Oedipus which is also mythical in character. The significance of this waste land is the sin of violating the sanctity of sex has in all ages and countries led to decay and degeneration. Oedipus unwittingly kills his father and marries his own mother and thus calls down upon his supposedly innocent head the curse of gods in the form virulent plague, epidemic and destructive which neither king nor commoner fails to regard as a punishment for some dark and hidden crime. Tiresias, the blind prophet is summoned and tells the shocking truth that he, the King himself, is the plague-spot. This Tiresias, according to Eliot, is the central figure in the poem, an interested spectator of the modern waste land. What Tiresias sees, is the substance of the whole poem. Tiresias, as represented in the 'Waste Land', is bisexual. He is blind but has the gift of prophecy and immortality. According to myth, Tiresias has the experience of both as a man and woman- bestowed upon the gift of prophetic vision. He is the fittest symbol of human consciousness itself. He is the enlightened ghost of the age, watching the depressing spectacle of modern humanity which has fallen from the ancient heights and forgotten old values and sanctities. He is the conscience of humanity. He is the sole spectator of the agonizing drama and a participator and fellow sufferer of both past and present. He probes deep into the strange disease with criminal complacency. His vision pierces through this veneer of complacency and lays bare the sordid cares and languid pursuits, the boredom and sheer vacuity of which humanity in the modern and post modern waste lands have fallen a prey.

In present time, we have a world of anarchy and industrialization in which we can see that life has become a monotonous routine, confined to offices, factories, garments, crop-fields and very other work-places. The waves of the mighty Ganges can not create any rhythm of mirth deep into our minds. Spring fails to provide any solace to the heart-core of the busy post modern waste landers. That is why Eliot rightly says: "April is the cruelest month". Anarchy has occupied the throne of most of the sovereign countries in the name of so called democracy. Monarchs act like 'Vogoban' (God) gathering round them a number of selfish 'oil users'. Millions of refugee are hovering over the world, trying to cross the national borders, grasping inside their infants among those many a infant goes to eternal sleep, lying on the sand or sea- shore. The Rohingya Muslims have been slaughtered by the professional Burmese group of butchers and one million are made bound to cross the native boarder. Education has become a matter of competition of securing highest GPA or CGPA forgetting the aim and objective of achieving knowledge. That is why, darkness resulting from education, occupies our civilization instead light. The secretaries and high officials of different ministries of a country are busy in displaying God like power, no growing concern for its citizens. The lanes and foot-paths of our traditional town, even the bamboo bush of our villages, are now filled with the rubbishes of modernity, the heap of blank alu-alu-blister packages of yaba (sexual medicine), condom and the blank bottle of phensedyl (drug). The village women are now gossiping about contraceptive

pills as Albert's mistress Lil in the section 'A Game of Chess'. All these mean that the spirits of our post modern waste landers are spiritually dying one. The old parents are admitted in care- home or locked up in old houses. The preachers of religion are now hankering after materialism and sex instead divinity. The prayer houses are being made merely to increase its scenic beauty to be a part of world heritage. All the perfume of Arabia will fail to bring spiritual refresh of our contemporary waste landers. The discipline of life as a human being, old sanctities and the practice of religious values may provide us a remedy for those above.

There is a third waste land also the Biblical waste land or the evil land of Emmaus, mentioned in Ecclesiastes and Ezekiel parts of the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel warns his followers to remember God and give up idolatry. Their sins have laid the country waste and regeneration will come only when they return to God. 'The dead tree', 'the handful of dust', 'the dry grass', 'the cricket', 'the rock', etc are all derived from the Biblical imagery of decay and desolation.

These three waste lands from mythical background to contemporary waste land, the panorama of futility and anarchy, is contemporary Europe. Those three, mentioned in the poem 'Waste Land' also mirror our post modern world of anarchy and autocratic governments world-wide. In such way, Eliot has linked up the past with the present, and universalized the topical. The theme of spiritual barrenness does not remain confined to Eliot's age only but it journeys to our contemporary post modern period. The spiritual sterility of the modern age is nothing peculiar to the post modern age of machine and extreme materialism. Sin, specially sexual perversion, has always resulted in spiritual decay and desolation. The poem ends with a note of hope for the inhabitants of the modern desolate land. Eliot says:

"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyta.
Shantih Shantih Shantih."

The above are quotations from The Spanish Tragedy and Upanishads by which Eliot hopes that if the waste landers of any time learn to give or surrender themselves over to some noble causes, if they learn to sympathize and acquire self-control, and if they remember that suffering alone can lead to spiritual salvation, they would acquire spiritual calmness and tranquility. Then there would be nothing in the world but 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih' in their lives. By this paper, it is conveyed to our post modern waste landers that they should come back to religion and religious values. Otherwise, we can't get spiritual regeneration and will be hired by barrenness and infertility. Because, human spirits have come from heaven and it can be smoothly guided by heavenly rules and obligations not by anything else, I think. We also should cherish the ideal as bellow:

"Any one will care for everyone,
All will be regarded as human."

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