CHAPTER II

The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock

T. S. Eliot's early poems, collected in the volume *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), are a landmark in English Poetry. The poet entirely abandons the pretence of entertaining and instructing an imaginary common reader and concentrates on using every means in his power to express the disturbed psyche of the modern man. The poems successfully communicate an unforgettable impression of the devilish present day modern city – a hell which miserably abounds in deteriorating human relationships, total dearth of communication among human beings and a corrosive sense of listlessness.

However, it is the technique of Eliot that attracts his critics towards his poems. He employs a number of linguistic and stylistic devices resulting in multiple suggestions overshadowing direct denotations. Hence, his poetry satisfies more the demands of a *dhvani* theorist and would facilitate the task of interpreting and assessing his poetry in the light of Ānandavardhana's theory of *dhvani*.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the opening poem in the anthology, is a monologue. Prufrock is the speaker. The woman to whom he wants to sing his love song though never appears on the scene, her presence in the poem is felt throughout. Her feelings, whatever they are, they come to us through Prufrock. The irony is that despite the title "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Prufrock's love song is never sung and perhaps shall never be.
The poem shows Prufrock going to a sophisticated party apparently a ladies' occasion of a cultural kind, but one which shares the vacuity of Boston society. He has a special mission. He is in love with one of the ladies and is going to declare it to her. But he is an irresolute person for whom the simplest decision is a matter of strain, speculation and distress. He is afraid of his failure to communicate and is equally afraid of success. His only wish is to regress to a safe haven where he will not be disturbed either by action or inaction. Thus, in "Prufrock" the theme of isolation is pervasive and the emotional conflict by which Prufrock has been torn apart is suggested through various devices where dhvani works on different levels.

The poem begins with a quotation from Dante's *Inferno*:

If I thought that I were making
Answer to one that might return to view
The world, this flame should evermore cease shaking
But since from this abyss, If I hear true,
None ever came alive, I have no fear
Of infamy, but give thee answer due.¹

Dante encounters in hell a character called Guido da Montefeltro who asks him for news of Italy, which Dante gives. Then he is asked in return to disclose what has brought him to hell, which he agrees to do, though only on the assumption that Dante is another lost soul who will never return to tell of Guido's shame. This extract from Dante included in the poem as the epigraph is to create

the situation that the poem is a confession.

Two contexts need to be referred to interpret the reason why Eliot chose to open his poem with this quotation. One, in which Dante wrote this poem and two, in which the entire gamut of Eliot's poem has been produced. Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* to depict the progression of soul from grief to joy or from damnation to bliss. But the state described in these lines is a state of damnation.

On the other hand, Eliot wrote his poem to show how by neglecting the spiritual values today's man, because of his love for the material world, is living in a hell. His resurrection will be possible only by giving up the latter and turning towards the spiritual life. When these two contexts are combined together the idea that emerges is that Eliot's aim is not simply to delineate the indecisiveness in the character of Prufrock but to evolve him as a representative figure. Prufrock, thus, is a representative of modern man from the modern hell, that is, the city he lives in. Killing his religion and the spiritual values, he is a victim of cowardice and frustration. His material values having enslaved him, the physical aspects of love deter him from developing true human relationships. He is weak, lacks determination and is groping in the dark maze of the modern world. He behaves like a blind man, who does not know how to seek and reach his destination. Thus the situations, images, figures of speech and phrases that Eliot employs in the poem, are a pointer towards this human situation. These can be analysed as follows:

As the poem opens the speaker or the persona is seen saying:

Let us go then, you and I,
Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.  

The question is who these 'You' and 'I' are? Looking at the theme of the poem the first idea that strikes is that the 'you' is the beloved and 'I' the lover. But when we connect this stanza with stanza ten of the song the 'you' and 'I' seem to be different characters. The stanza ten reads:

If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.' (Prufrock. 97-99)

The suggestion that rises is that the 'one' here is the beloved, addressed as the third person. As such 'you' and 'I' are not the speaker and the beloved but the two divided selves of Prufrock himself. 'I' is the amorous and the desiring self while 'you', the thinking, timid self. In this way, the whole poem is a debate going on in the mind of the speaker. The amorous self is coaxing the thinking self to gather courage, go with him and reveal his heart to the beloved. The debate between the two must have started much earlier than the point where the poem begins because in the opening line Prufrock uses the expression "Let us go then, you and I." The word 'then' acts as vyañjaka śabdaḥ (suggestive word). It suggests that there must have been a long argument and the amorous self has

ultimately succeeded in convincing the thinking self and now concludes that they should go and fulfil their mission which is to make an offer to the beloved to have a date at certain time of the day. The time he chooses is the evening time. He says:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table. \(\text{(Prufrock, 1-3)}\)

The \textit{abhidhā} (denotation) power of words functioning here conveys the \textit{vācyārtha} (denoted meaning) that the evening is quiet like a patient who is etherised. But this meaning is not intended here because the poet’s aim is to suggest a mood and mind of Prufrock. A patient is one who is under medical treatment because he is not fit and well. He is etherised to be relieved of pain. When one is etherised he feels sleepy, drowsy, dull and inactive. When taken in the light of \textit{prakarana} (context) of the poem, the \textit{arthāntarasāṅkrmita avivakṣitavācyadhvani} (suggestion of unintended literal import with merged in the other), suggests that like an etherised patient, Prufrock also remains inactive because he is timid and of nervous temperament. At the same time his desiring self compels him to go and open his heart to the beloved. The question that arises is that why does he want to go in the evening only?

Though the author does not say anything directly, the \textit{prakarana} (context) suggests that Prufrock is a man of nervous tension. He wants to avoid any company. He does not want to be observed. Hence he prefers to choose a time
when people are tired and retreating to their respective homes or the cheap hotels not bothering about others.

The next description is about the place he would like to go or the path he would prefer to follow. Regarding the path he says he would like to “go through certain half-deserted streets” and the place he would like to go is either a “cheap hotel” or “sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells.”

The vācyārtha (literal meaning) intended here is that the rendezvous, the speaker proposes, is a deserted and cheap hotel. In the expressions “half-deserted streets”, “muttering retreats”, “cheap hotels”, the adjectives give the suggestion of the type of places which are vulgar and undesirable and unlocked for by the decent London society. Thus the arthaśaktiudbhavasam lakṣyakramadhvani (the suggestion through meaning) suggests that the speaker is biased towards physical enjoyments. At the same time, since he is nervous he is seeking a place where he may remain unnoticed and uncared for.

However, the dhvani in the stanza works on other levels too.

Eliot is a pioneer of symbolic technique in the twentieth century. Images of different varieties and kinds, acting as symbols and subduing the denotation, lead to polysemus effects. Some images like those of obnoxious smells, odours and colours are often used to suggest voluptuousness and lack of depth in human relationships. Here, too, though there is no direct reference to any of the above images, the very description of ‘sawdust’ and ‘oyster-shells’ tickles our sense of smell.
Following this, the figure *upama* (simile) appears again in the line where streets have been compared to a “tedious argument of an insidious intent.” The suggestion here is not that the streets are ‘tedious’ or ‘insidious’. On the contrary, the suggested sense is that it is the speaker’s own attitude which is insidious and the tedium is not in the streets but in the mind of the speaker, who wants, yet finds it a tedious task to face the situation.

Hence, as it is in a tedious argument, the poet now confronts a question. He does not reveal the question, yet whenever the question comes he falters and stops abruptly. This abrupt break after the mention of the question and Prufrock’s refusal to identify it by saying, “oh, do not ask what is it?”, show that the *vivakṣitavācyā* (intended literal import) further extends to suggest two things. Firstly, that Prufrock does not hope to have any permanent relationship with the lady. It is because of this reason that he cannot answer the question that what will be the end of their relation or where it would lead them to. Secondly, Prufrock is scared of facing the reality, that is, the expected apathy in the woman’s reaction to his proposal.

Hence, if we relate the meaning of this stanza with the context of the entire literature of T. S. Eliot, we can easily conclude that the poet is leading to the suggestion of fall of true relationships and lack of understanding among all human beings in general. This *arthāntarasāṅkramitadhvani* (shifting of literal meaning) is further strengthened by the refrain, “In the room the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo.”
Michelangelo was a great artist and when the poet shows that the ladies are talking about the artist the vastudhvani is to suggest that the woman belongs to the upper strata of society. The poet knows about the snobbery of such women and confirms that the lady would pay no attention to him. Stanza one ends here but the persona's imaginative journey continues.

The atmosphere of drowsiness and dullness, created in the first stanza through the image of "etherised patient", is again presented in stanza two with the help of alaṅkāradhvani. Prufrock now is in the street where "yellow fog rubs its back" and "yellow smoke rubs its muzzle on the window-panes." It "licked" the "corners of the evening", "lingered upon the pools", let fall soot upon its back, "slipped by the terrace", and eventually "curled" and settled "about the house" and "fell asleep."

There is avivakṣitavācyadhvani or suggestion where the denoted sense is not intended by the poet. The "fog" and the "smoke" are personified as a cat and as such the vācyārtha (literal meaning) in the context being subordinated, falls in the category of praudhokti, that is, where its existence is real only in the ornate expressions of the poet. Otherwise the purpose is only to suggest Prufrock's mental state.

The Šabdaśaktimūladhvani (suggestion based on the power of words) in the dark images of "fog", "smoke" and the adjective "yellow" attributed to them, symbolises fear and depression in the mind of the speaker. The literal meaning is atyantamtišṛktam (completely put aside) and the condition of the cat who
"curled once about the house, and fell asleep" suggests the speaker's greater desire to remain inert.

The licking of fog or smoke suggests that there is something that penetratingly hurts the speaker. He seems to have a premonition that the woman would reject him. The suggestion of the cause of this kind of thought comes from the fourth stanza where he becomes conscious of his debilitating condition. With a bitterness he thinks that the ladies will make a fun of his thin arms and legs and "bald spot". Thus, the vastudhvani resonating in the whole of the stanza suggests the idea that Prufrock does not have the courage to reveal his heart to the lady. The impending apprehension regarding the possible hurting reaction of the woman holds him back and he prefers to remain dull at the moment.

Ānandavardhana stresses³ that a figure should not be carried too far and even if it is over sustained its nature should be kept subordinated. In this sense, in stanza two of the poem, although the metaphor has been kept up to the end, it remains secondary and the idea of indecisiveness and conflict in the mind of Prufrock remains dominant.

Throughout the poem Prufrock oscillates between two psychological conditions — the loss of confidence and his effort to regain confidence. The interim is filled either with Hamlet like debate that should he or should he not make an offer or his imagination about the possible reactions of his lady. Stanza III opens with a word of confidence and no sooner than he tries to gain confidence he is seen postponing the matter. He says:

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet. (Prufrock 26-27)

Besides the use of vastudhvani (suggestion of idea) and arthaśaktimūladhvani (suggestion based on the power of sense), another device that the poet uses here is the repetition of phrases. The abhidhā (denotation) conveys the sense that he is postponing some work, but this vācyārtha (literal meaning) subordinating itself suggests that Prufrock is losing confidence and trying to console himself that there will be time to think and act. Immediately following this is the sentence, “There will be time to murder and create.” There is the use of virodha (contradiction or oxymoron) and atiśayokti (hyperbole) in the two words “murder” and “create”. Here “murder” actually does not mean killing but it suggests the idea that his beloved’s refusal to accept his offer would be like killing him, whereas the word “create” suggests that if she accepts him it would be like giving him a new life. The figure of speech atiśayokti (hyperbole) appears for the idea is exaggerated that she can murder him by rejecting his love. Thus, the hyperbole is suggestive not only of lack of confidence in Prufrock but also of the mentality and the attitude of the beloved which shakes his confidence. The two devices that help in the suggestion of these ideas are the alaṅkāradhvani and the arthaśaktimūladhvani.

While the tussle between the two possible situations that she might accept or reject him, is going on the nervous Prufrock resorts to his old tricks of postponing the matter and immediately the desiring mind consoles the thinking mind to not to worry as there is still the time to think.
In this way time offers him an escape. But this escape is good only up to
the crucial moment when:

... the works and days of hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate. (Prufrock. 29-30)

The kramendyotiḥ vivakṣitānyaparavācyadhvani, that is, suggestion of
intended but further extending literal import with discernible sequentiality can be
seen here, for a sequence between the comprehension of the vācyārtha (literal
meaning) and vyaṅgyārtha (suggested meaning) is noticed. The word “drop” as a
vyaṅjaka śabdāḥ (suggestive word) denotes the sense that something has been
released and fallen by mistake. When something is served in the plate one has
to eat it. This vācyārtha (literal meaning), when taken in the prakarana (context)
of the poem, further extends to suggest the moment of crisis, as the question is
now being imposed on him and he cannot avoid it.

However, repeating the line, “Time for you and time for me” he consoles
himself that he can think and revise thousands of visions before confessing his
love to her, or “Before the taking of a toast and tea”. Perhaps he is hopeful of his
success and the idea is suggested through the vastudhvani in the action of
taking “toast and tea”. There is as such the use of virodha (figure of
contradiction) in the whole stanza as it suggests a contradictory situation that the
persona wants the woman to know about his love yet does not want to take any
action himself. The reason is hinted in the refrain:

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo. (Prufrock. 35-36)
She is a snob who would care more for the pretentious society rather than the true feelings either of another person or of her own.

The section ends here and the vyanjana (suggestion) in the whole of the stanza rises because of kramendyotitaḥ vivakṣilāṭyaparavācyya, that is, suggestion of intended but further extending literal import with discerned sequentiality (where one idea is leading to another).

Stanza IV that follows is a significant one because there, with the help of vastudhvani and the praudhokti, the speaker is presenting a situation which suggests certain possible reasons because of which Prufrock feels that his lady-love might refuse to accept his offer of love. What he describes is svataḥ sambhava (naturally existing) yet the vyanjana behind the vācyārtha contributes to the core and nerve of the poem. Prufrock says:

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, ‘Do I dare?’ and, ‘Do I dare?’
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –
(They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –
(They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’)
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (Prufrock 37-48)

The stanza consists of twelve lines and it can be divided into three sections. The first section includes three lines:

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, ‘Do I dare?’ and ‘Do I dare?’
Time to turn back and descend the stair. (Prufrock 37-39)

Prufrock is still finding comfort in time. He does the self analysis if he has the courage to go and propose to the lady. In his mind he enters the room but thinks that still he can go back to his own world. The vācyārtha (literal meaning) actually suggests his hesitation and indecisiveness.

The second part of the stanza comprises next five lines. Here Prufrock reveals the cause because of which he is hesitating to go forward boldly and speak his mind to her. The reason is his deteriorating physical condition. The age has beaten him and he is now a man:

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –
(They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –
(They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’) (Prufrock 40-44)

The abhidhā (denotation) conveys that he is describing his own physical appearance. But the intention of the poet is not to stop here. The ladies’ exclamation about his “bald spot”, his thin “arms and legs” suggests the attitude and the narrow mentality of the society of women. Society demands that the
person who wants to propose to a lady or who is in love must be young and handsome. The inclination of society is more towards the physical aspect of the personality. This attitude of the society makes Prufrock too conscious of his appearance. He is afraid that the ladies will talk about all these superficial things and will not peep into his inner world. Thus, the stanza so far presents a tensional image of Prufrock. Vastudhvani (suggestion of idea) functions effectively as through the description of external things the poet suggests the fact that it is the society and people around Prufrock who are responsible for his cowardice, timidity and his inability to express his feelings.

The last part of the stanza comprises remaining four lines and brings it to a close with the alaṅkāra (figure of speech) by using atiśayokti (hyperbole). With his consciousness about his misshapened figure and strokes of age on his features, Prufrock wonders if he has the courage to distract and insult these ‘goddesses’, who are placed so high in society, by his inconsiderate step to make an offer. He questions, “Do I dare/Disturb the universe?”, as if by his offer he will disturb even the whole balance of planets and galaxies.

The āksipta (implied) sense in the atiśayokti (hyperbole) suggests that Prufrock, being aware of the complacent and passive attitude of people around him, does not dare to jolt them away from their conformism and retraces his steps.

Thus the poem, as accepted, is a psychological drama but, at the same time, as it proceeds through changing imagery, grammatical forms and punctuation the poet creates a sense of progression. The opening sentence of
the following three stanzas i.e., five, six and seven, begins with the words “And I have known”. The tense is present perfect and there is a dash (-) at the end of each of these lines as if the speaker pauses to ponder over and recall what has been familiar to him. The use of present perfect “have known” thus creates the impression that the persona is standing at the threshold of the room where the ladies being referred to, are sitting in their usual style. He recalls the times he has known, the evening, morning and afternoons spent with the ladies where he “measured out” his “life with coffee spoons”. He also knows the “voices” which are coming “from a farther room”. Therefore, Prufrock is not new to the place but he is well aware of the daily routine and habits of these society women.

In the expression "measuring out life with coffee spoons" there is praudhokti (ornate expression), for one cannot measure one’s life with coffee spoons. It suggests the idea of triviality and aimless pursuit of life. Arthaśaktimūladhvani (suggestion based on the power of sense) can be seen functioning effectively, for the vivakṣitavācyā further extends to suggest the idea of the way of life of the society women, devoid of all feelings. Prufrock does not expect that his beloved who is one of them, will be any better and care for his feelings. He cannot presume that her reaction would be favourable for they are all opportunists whose behaviour is unpredictable. This doubt in the mind leads to the question, “so how should I presume?” (that she would accept him).

The situation given by Eliot is ironical. In his principle Ānandavardhana rejects the use of irony with śrṅgāra rasa (erotic sentiment). But Eliot here is quite justified because, though it is a love song there is hardly any śrṅgāra rasa
and irony is suited to the purpose which is to point out the apathy and the
degenerating values of the society.

With this we reach the stanza six. The method of vyārjanā continues to
be same. First there is vastudhvani but since the situation also includes actions
of the women and reactions in his own mind, the intended meaning continuing,
there rises a suggestion regarding the psychological condition of the persona.
The scene continues to be same as in stanza five. The only difference is that
whereas in stanza five Prufrock was standing at the threshold watching the
ladies, now it is he who is being watched, though all in his imagination. Hence
when we read the stanza the praudhokti (through appeal to imagination and not
fact) affects us in two ways. On one side, there is the behaviour of the ladies that
Prufrock is expecting to face, while on the other, is the reaction of the whole
situation in the mind of Prufrock.

Eliot is able to create a sense of progression with the help of catalogue of
actions one after the other. Prufrock is well familiar with the ladies and imagines
how those eyes would fix him “in a formulated phrase”. The vācyārtha (literal
meaning) is avivakṣita (unintended) here, for eyes cannot fix anyone. The poet is
using metonymy and the literal sense is atyantam tiraskṛtam (completely lost).
The aim of the writer is not simply to describe how the ladies would look at
Prufrock but to depict his psychological state. Moreover, when we study it in the
light of the prakarana (context) of the whole poem it once again points at the
hollowness of love between man and woman. Even women, today are so
conscious of the physical charm that the materialistic values stride over the true feelings. This being the attitude of women, Prufrock in nervous tension avows:

... when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin. (Prufrock. 57-59)

A few linguistic devices and features in punctuation bring in dhvani:

(a) The past participle, "I have known" suggests that he sees the eyes from certain distance and recalls that they are familiar eyes.

(b) the hyphen ( - ) suggests the conflict and diffidence in him before taking the next step.

(c) Following this is the line, "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase". Here both the phrase and the tense in it are significant. The phrase used is "formulated phrase" which by abhidhā (denotation) denotes the formulated or the artificiality in her manner of speaking. In its prakaran (context) the arthaśaktimūḍadhvani (suggestion based on the power of sense) suggests snobbery and pretensions in the society of the club-crazy man and woman.

(d) Similarly, the tense, though Present tense, suggests what he thinks might happen when he meets her.

Thus, the poet has used praudhokti (ornate expression) throughout the stanza. Alaṅkāradhvani (suggestion of figure) functions here for the idea of similitude between Prufrock and insect has been suggested as Prufrock has been classified as an insect. The avivakṣitavācyā (unintended literal meaning) subordinating its meaning becomes suggestive. When an insect is pinned it
twists and turns its body to get free. The vācyārtha is arthāntarasaṅkrmita (merged in the other meaning), i.e., the eyes of the ladies have fixed Prufrock in front of them and he finds himself unable to move. The suggested meaning is that he is so influenced and attracted by the lady that in spite of knowing her attitude, he cannot leave her.

The above thoughts again bring doubt and conflict in his mind. "How should I begin?" he meditates for the sense of doubt about lady's response shakes his confidence. He says:

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume? (Prufrock, 60-61)

The mere colloquial expression "to spit out" is suggestive of the disgust in the mind of Prufrock and the derisive and abject attitude of the lady. Various stylistic devices work to bring dhvani in it. First of all the very action of spitting expresses rejection and a sense of dislike. Secondly, there is śabdaśaktimūladhvani and arthaśaktimūladhvani (suggestion based on the power of word and sense) in the phrase and the colloquiality has a creative effect upon the reader. It shows lack of sophistication which itself is suggestive of the absence of any decency in the attitude of the woman.

It also suggests that Prufrock is now realising the snobbery of the so-called sophisticated society of woman and his "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Rising like a charm the implied meaning and the dhvani overpower the mind of the reader. There is irony and mockery in the whole situation and as said earlier, this is no obstruction or a weakness when used with the passion of love, for, to
create śṛṅgāra rasa is not the aim of the poet here. Eliot just wants to ridicule and irony is the most suitable weapon in the situation.

Having talked of "voice" and "eyes" he now turns his attention to lady's arms in stanza VII. He avows:

And I have known the arms already, known them all
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!) (Prufrock 62-64)

The vastudhvani in its prakarana (context) is highly suggestive of lust and sensuousness of Prufrock’s love. He is charmed more by the lady’s physique rather than anything else. Besides, the vivakṣitavācyā (literal meaning) further extends to suggest the idea that Prufrock had once been so close to the society of women that he is aware of their ways and moods and physical forms. Knowing this and his own weaknesses, he repeats the refrain, which he had been uttering since stanza five, “And should I then presume?”, i.e., how can he presume that she would accept him? Even if he presumes she would, he does not know “how should I begin?”

However, Prufrock is conscious that perhaps in this adventure he has not been the lone sufferer. Like Keats's La Belle, who mercilessly befooled and discarded a number of knights loitering with parched lips and hungry for love, the ladies of this so called sophisticated society have left a number of men to such curse. In straight words Prufrock recalls:

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? (Prufrock. 70-72).

The picture is clear speaking for itself. The śabdaśaktimūladhvani in the word "lonely" immediately explains and suggests the idea of the set back experienced by these men. The image that follows is more suggestive. He says:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas. (Prufrock. 73-74)

Both the vācyārtha, and the suggestion based on the power of word and meaning are active here. The word "sea" denotes the salty water that covers about three quarters of the earth's surface. It is very wide as well as deep. "Floors" stand for the bottom of it which is almost hidden. The adjective "silent" attributed to the "sea" denotes that the sea is very quiet and calm and there is no disturbance in the sea. This denoted meaning of "silent seas" when seen in the prakarana (context) of the poem and epigraph suggests the subconscious mind of Prufrock which is hidden and whatever is going on there cannot be revealed or seen by others.

The phrase "a pair of ragged claws" stands for a crab who scuttles and runs across the floors of the sea. The "claws" are the hard and curved nails of an animal and they suggest the longing for uncomplicated animal existence. They can clutch their prey and make off with it without any preface of "Do I dare?" or "Shall I say?" They are at home and free in the silent sea and can scuttle as they desire.

All these words/phrases put together in the couplet present an underwater imagery and subordinating its conventional meaning the image suggests the idea
that Prufrock's secret wish is only to regress to a safe haven where his inner universe is no longer disturbed by any tormenting human problem. He is fed up of the human existence and wants to escape it. He would have preferred to be a crab moving spontaneously across the calm and undisturbed floors of sea rather than bear the curse of living a hellish existence as a man. When experience reaches the stage of communication he fails to go forward, hence his preference for "silent seas".

At the end of the day he reckons what he has been doing all along the day except following the fixed routine. What follows is an upsurge from his unconscious mind. Like a jealous wife he sees "the afternoon, the evening" sleeping "so peacefully". They are "smoothed by long fingers". Whose fingers these are is not described but the lakṣaṇa (metonymy) in the description of "long fingers" suggests that Prufrock is imagining that the afternoon and the evening are so peaceful because of the love they are getting from their beloveds. In the prakarana (context) of the poem, the praudhokti (ornate expression) suggests that what Prufrock sees is actually the projection of his own mind or what he wishes to achieve for himself. Retrospection is intensified by the question he asks himself. He says:

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? (Prufrock, 79-80)

The mode of interrogation itself is dhvanyātmak (suggestive). The phrase "should I" suggests that at a time when the lady is enjoying herself he should not go with his ugly face and flare up the moment of crisis. Earlier also, he
confesses, there have been such moments when he lost his confidence and “flickered” at the opportune time.

The rhyme of “ices” and “crisis” also becomes functional here. There is first the suggestion of silence in “ices” and when rhymed against “crisis”, it presents an antithetical situation that is, at a time when there is silence on the part of the lady he dare not make an offer and bring in the crisis. Secondly, the vastudhvani in the object ‘ice’ suggests the coldness in the feelings and attitude of the woman.

Prufrock who is guided more by his imagination than the practical solutions ends up in the stanza with a confession that though he is not a prophet, he has been able to imagine how he would be rejected if he ever made an effort to make an offer of marriage. “In short”, he says, he “was afraid”.

The following stanza (10) is a continuation of this debate and his defeated argument that it is needless to make an offer to a woman with such a nonchalant attitude. Her reaction is suggested through vastudhvani and alaṅkāradhvani.

Vastudhvani, because he says that it would not have been “worth it” to make an offer “After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,/Among the porcelain”. The catalogue of objects suggests the material values and the enjoyment of material life by the woman who does not go by feelings but by the looks of a person. Hence the phrase, “To have bitten off the matter with a smile”. The alaṅkāradhvani suggests that she would have rejected his offer as easily as one can bite a biscuit. There is also the arthaśaktimūladhvani (suggestion based on
the power of sense) as all the activities described here suggest the mood of refusal in the lady.

Following this is the use of atiśayokti (hyperbole). He says:

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it towards some overwhelming question (Prufrock. 93-94)

Prufrock is guessing about the reaction of the lady. The vācyārtha (literal meaning) is just impossible because one cannot “squeeze a universe” in the ball. This sense is avivakṣita (unintended) and belongs to its sub-variety atyantam tiraskṛtam (completely lost). One may squeeze a paper in a ball and discard it if it is of no use. The atiśayokti (hyperbole) in the image of squeezing subordinating itself suggests that for Prufrock the task of proposing marriage is as enormous as the universe itself and ever more impossible task is to throw it to her as one throws away a paper ball.

He, then avows he is not Lazarus, the prophet, who can tell the future or the possible reaction of the woman to his proposal. The image of the woman, settling a pillow by her head and answering, is deep in vastudhvani because she is free from any anxiety and least bothered as she is least interested in him. He believes that against his expectations she may turn down his proposal saying:

‘That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all’. (Prufrock. 98-99)

Continuing with the same situation the author, after using the adverb ‘After’ in line two and three makes a long catalogue of the objects in lady’s room and her various activities. However, the vācyārtha (literal meaning) is
subordinated because the catalogue of things stands as vyañjaka śabdaḥ (suggestive words). The intended literal import is further extended and as he counts one object after another, it suggests that the poet is trying to gather courage and go forward and with every step he is feeling the tediousness of the labour he has to put to reach the moment when he can make his offer. Besides, the vastudhvani functioning, it suggests the idea of dry monotonity of everyday life and the artificial banalities of the middle class society. The adverse atmosphere deters Prufrock from opening his heart.

At this juncture the image that Eliot uses is deep and effective. Prufrock says:

After the novels, after the tea cups...

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it is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

'That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all.' (Prufrock, 103-111)

The nerves of a man cannot be seen by the naked eye but by the ‘X’ rays.

In the same way, the subconscious mind of a man if revealed at all, could be seen by a magic lantern. In other words while standing in a room by the lady’s side, if inspired by some magical powers he gathers courage and speaks out his
subconscious mind, will it be worth while to do so only to be retaliated and refused.

The vācyārtha (literal sense) is avivakṣita (unintended) here and the appeal is through praudhokti (poetic imagination). The repetition of the lines, "That is not it at all/That is not what I meant at all", on one side, suggests the uncertainty and the apathetic attitude of the woman and on the other, reflects nervousness and tension crushing the peace of his mind.

Following this there is a slight turn for good, but very momentary. When the lady's possible remark echoes in his ears a wave of confidence stirs him immediately and he avows promisingly:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two. (Prufrock. 112-114)

The proper noun "Hamlet" becomes suggestive as it carries the force of arthāntarasāṅkrmita dhvani, i.e., the subtype of unintended literal import where the expressed sense merges in other meaning. "Hamlet" does not stand merely for Hamlet the prince, but merges itself in the idea of a man with indecision or one with the habit to postpone and delay the actions.

But why does he call himself an "attendant lord"? There is virodha (contradiction) in the two words "attendant" and "lord". In the context of the poem it is seen that there are two characters in the poem – 'you' and 'I'. 'You' is the thinking timid self, while 'I', the desiring self. Desire dominates the thoughts of a man yet acts like one who obeys the dictates of thoughts, i.e., thoughts plan for
Desires make man and his thoughts to go forward and act. At times what this self desires may be ridiculous and foolish. Thus the śabdaśaktimūlādhvani and alaṅkāradhvani in the whole metaphor, comparing Prufrock to Hamlet, give a rich suggestion.

Interestingly enough, no sooner than this confidence is built up and inspires him to go forward there rises the force of resistance. The timid self overpowering, the desiring self regresses thinking it is foolish on his part for he has grown “old” and physically unattractive. There is meaning with intended literal import resulting in discerned sequentiality. As Hamlet, what Prufrock speaks of himself represents the irony in the life of all human beings. True love in the twentieth century declines with the declining age and the loss of physical charm. In short, it is limited to the physical aspect only. Thus the arthaśaktimūlādhvani becoming strong, the suggestion that rises is that deeper relations and feelings are negated; all human relationships are a hoax. Prufrock asserts the unromantic character to which he resigns himself. However, he resolves to be little sportive. He starts imagining if by wearing “white flannel trousers” or by eating peach or parting his hair at the centre he could be a dandy walking upon the beach. He ruminates: "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each."

The metaphor here leads to dhvani (suggestion). She is imagined as a mermaid because, however much he may age himself but she would, like Keats’s ‘dame’ or the ‘urn’ will always be young and beautiful. But, another point which emerges as highly suggestive and significant is that just as mermaids are
mere visions, his mermaid, the beloved, too for him is an impalpable dream. That is why the following sentence is too confessional the moment he says:

I do not think that they will sing to me. (Prufrock. 126)

She will merely be a vision to him, she will never accept him. The irony of fate here actuates the whole scene with a sense of pity because of his realisation of the foolish step he wants to take.

With these lines the poem turns towards the conclusion. The imagery now dominates. Prufrock says:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves.
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black. (Prufrock. 127-129)

The personification which describes the sea life with "mermaids", waves with its white hair "blown back", subordinating the literal meaning extends the suggested meaning. The underwater imagery evolves and becomes suggestive of Prufrock's subconscious mind. Like the crab scuttling across the floors of the sea, the mermaids also live delightfully and sprightly in their natural environment which is denied to him.

With this realisation there comes the moment of reversal in the life of this tragic character – the new Hamlet. There comes the realisation and a calming down of all pent-up emotions. He resolves:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (Prufrock. 130-132)
Two points are to be noted here. First that the phrase “chambers of the sea” both by the svatahsambhav (naturally existing) sense that he is talking of the hidden bed of the sea and the vastudhvani suggests that the imagery represents the unconscious mind where Prufrock’s divided selves ‘you’ and ‘I’ are now merged. Desires have surrendered to the age.

Secondly there are three phrases here in which the vastudhvani dominates. These are “chambers of the sea”, the “sea-girls” and “wreathed with seaweed red and brown”. Seen in the context and a fact of life that there are no such beings as mermaids, the suggestion that comes through vācyārtha is that Prufrock realises that he had been wandering through his subconscious mind and dream-visions till he heard the human voices, i.e., reality.

The poem ends with this imagery that so far he was in the chambers of the water hearing the songs of the mermaids, but the moment he hears the human voices he wakes up. But Prufrock says that it is not only that he wakes up but hearing these voices “he drowns”.

The praudhokti (ornate expression) here brings in the virodha (contradiction) for so long as he was in the water he remained alive but the moment he came out of the sea of the unconscious mind and faces the reality he drowns or he is dead. Actually the process should have been reverse. The ojas (strength) in the words and the vyanjanā leading to vyaṅgya (suggestion) is most effective for the song of the mermaids becomes his swan song.

He finds himself destroyed because ever since he has heard the voices of his beloved he has lost the peace of his mind. He is a broken reed. He realises
that to expect love from the so called beloved is like catching a mermaid. He should realise that “Fancy cannot cheat so well as it is feigned to do”.

Thus, though the title reads “The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, there has never been either the ‘love’ or a ‘song’, nor an offer of love would be made. There is vyangya (irony) in the title that such was the love song as had no tone of love in it. Prufrock was a dreamer controlled by his subconscious – hence a failure.

Hence, it can be concluded that Prufrock’s is a case of frustrated love with lack of response from the side of the lady character. According to the norms of Indian Poetics, we can say that there is rasābhāsa or semblance of rasa only but not rasa. While elaborating the suggestion with ‘undiscerned sequentiality’, a sub-variety of suggestion with intended literal import Ānandavardhana includes rasabhāsa also and writes:

> Sentiment, emotion, the semblance of
sentiment or mood and their (rise and)
cessation etc., are all of ‘undiscerned
sequentiality’.

The poem is an expression of a mind desiring and longing but, unfortunately defeated by its own arguments. The moment we connect it to the prakarana (context) of the central thought in Eliot’s major poems, Prufrock emerges as the representative figure of a twentieth century man – a victim/prey

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of indecisiveness, diffidence and stress, ultimately getting mutilated in the face of reality.

The above analysis therefore provides ample space to accommodate the idea that the poem as a whole can be categorised as dhvanikāvyā or Suggestive Poetry.