CHAPTER I

T.S. ELIOT AND JIBANANANDA DAS

Violence in the personal and familial life of T. S. Eliot and Jibanananda Das, translated into violence in their poetry

The novelist William Golding (1911 - 1993) views the twentieth century as “the most violent century in human history.” Rightly so, for the century had really been dominated by violent events of different forms and dimensions. Both the poets Eliot and Das emerged at a crucial hour of history. They were near-contemporaries and born in the last quarter of the 19th century. Their birth at that particular moment of history and their subsequent upbringing in their respective political, socio-economic, religious and cultural ambience played a significant role in the formation of their poetic perception, sensibilities and historical outlook. These factors are also largely responsible for giving a distinctive shape and character to their poetic art. Moreover, the suffering, agony and deprivation in their personal and familial life played a significant role in the formation of their poetic art. In this respect the influence of childhood deserves special mention in analyzing violence in their poetry. Both Eliot and Das share overwhelming similarities despite their cultural differences. Both the poets inherited strong and healthy religious and cultural backgrounds. Charlotte Eliot, mother of T. S. Eliot, and Kusum Kumari Das, the mother of Jibanananda Das, were themselves poets in their own right. Both the poets acknowledged their debts several times to their mothers. Moreover, the grandfather of T. S. Eliot, the founder of the Unitarian Church in Saint Louis had been a life-long influence for the poet. Likewise, the father of Das and his membership of the Brahmo Samaj had a great impact on the life of the budding poet. There are also similarities in their birthplaces and their subsequent migration. Eliot was born in a suburb of Saint Louis and later his family migrated to Boston. In the same way, Das was born in the suburban town of Barishal (at present in Bangladesh), but later migrated to Kolkata. These are no meagre influences in the life of the poets who had great love for their families and cultural

traditions. Both Eliot and Das acknowledged how childhood had been a life-long influence throughout their whole poetic career. Eliot in his later life asserted, that “…the primary channel of transmission of culture is the family, no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree of culture which he acquired from his early environment.”15 In fact, Eliot’s religious outlook was so greatly influenced by his grandfather W. G. Eliot that the poet’s later conversion can be traced back to his grandfather’s views and ideas. Eliot recalled:

“The standard of conduct was that which my grandfather had set, our moral judgments, our decisions between duty and self-indulgence were taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down the tables of the law, any deviations from which would be sinful.”16

This statement shows how the influence of the family came to captivate the delicate and sensitive soul of the budding poet. Perhaps Eliot’s moral earnestness and sincerity in accepting the religious and ethical code of conduct literally in his early life had a permanent effect. Probably, in many cases the repressive effect of his soul gave vent to violence in his poetry.

Similarly, in Das’s poetry also violence became an important element due to familial influence. Sucharita Das, the poet’s sister, wrote:

“Once my brother was affected by a deadly disease in his adolescent age. There was no hope of survival. My mother and grandfather travelled to many health resorts, different places of different climate - Lucknow, Agra, Delhi. In those days our economic condition was not well. I came to know from old letters that each and every kith and kin of our family took this attempt of my mother as suicidal. Yet my mother was not disturbed. After spending a long time in the west, curing that child completely, she came back.”17


Such a child becomes psychologically over-dependent on the mother. When the poet entered his youth, this led to a typical Freudian psycho-sexual crisis, from which he could never come out. This deep attachment to his mother had an influence in his life which created tension and unrest in his conjugal life. Here we find a typical similarity between Eliot and Das because Eliot’s early life was also profoundly influenced by his mother.

The conjugal life of both Eliot and Das was unhappy and painful. About Eliot’s married life Manju Jain comments, “Much has been written about their marriage. It appears to have caused them both intense suffering because of their contrasting temperaments, recurrent financial problems and Vivien’s chronic illness.”18 We get almost the same picture in Das’s married life. His nephew Amitananda Das wrote:

“This is an arranged marriage with his consent. It is unnecessary to mention this because it was quite customary in those days, even in Brahma Samaj, for the boys and girls to arrange their marriage on their own liking. My parents also had done this. My aunt was talented and in her early years she was beautiful. Later she became a teacher and finally assistant head mistress. But unfortunately, there was not good mental adjustment between the two ~ and there is reflection of it in Jibanananda’s poetry.”19

The personal life of both the poets became disturbed due to their unstable professional life and acute financial crisis. To support his family Eliot took up the job of a schoolmaster in High Wycombe Grammar School, some way out of London. After one term he moved to High Gate Junior School, which was nearer home. Eliot found school teaching quite unsuitable. In 1917 he gave it up and joined the foreign department of Lloyd’s Bank in the city of London, where he remained for eight years. In the same year of 1917, he became assistant editor of the *Egoist*. Das’s professional life was more unstable. He worked in seven colleges as a lecturer in English. Throughout his life financial crises never left him. This can be easily understood from

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a letter to his friend Achintya Kumar Sengupta, “I have been doing nothing special now-a-days. Days are going on with the small earning of teaching. I applied for a job; they wanted a reference. I have mentioned your name in it. These jobs I will not get...”  

This statement is a testimony to the deep anguish and utter frustration the poet had to undergo. This helplessness of the poet has been sometimes channelized as violent poetic outburst. He thus expressed his grudge against the so-called intellectuals:

Adbhut andhar ek esechhe e prithibite aaj
Yara andha sabcheye beshi aaj chokhe dakhe tara;
Hridaye jader kono prem nei- preeti nei- korunar
Aloron nei
Prithibi achal ajj tader suparamarsha chhada.
Jader gavir astha achhe aajo manusher prati
Ekhuno jader kachhe swabhabik bole mane hoi
Mahath satya ba riti, kingba shilpo o sadhana
Sakun o shealer khadya aaj jader hriday.

[A strange darkness has descended upon the day/The finest vision belongs to the blind;/The world is led by the counsel/ Of the loveless, pitiless ghosts;/ And upon the hearts of those that yet believe/ In light, in the undying flame of man’s enduring quest/ Hyenas and vultures feast. ]

(‘Adbhut Andhar Ek’ [A Strange Darkness]).

Personal bitterness, confinement and repression may get violent representation in verse. Similarly, religious and psycho-sexual repression led both the poets to cynical and angry outbursts in their poetry. Eliot’s ‘Burnt Norton’ gives example of such an event. The poet tends to call up the psycho-sexually repressed experience of childhood days. The famous lines follow thus:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened

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Into the rose garden.

(‘Burnt Norton’, *Four Quartets*)

Eliot was a proclaimed practitioner of objectivity and impersonality in poetry. But poets are human beings and so poetry cannot be a mechanical output. Though he advocated “escape from emotion”\(^{21}\) while writing poetry, he always amalgamated his deeply felt thoughts with objective reality. Therefore, it is natural that some sorts of violence, metamorphosed into poetry, are both personal as well as universal. Conjugal discontent, fatigue and tension have been channelized into versified violence by both the poets Eliot and Das. The unconventional jargon, staccato language and innovative poetic form reflect the broken and bizarre state of their own existence. Almost all through his poems Eliot criticized the falsities of the man-woman relationship, particularly the physical aspect of the relationship. But he was no misogynist and his tirade is never directed against women in general. Eliot’s mundane women are shallow, hollow, flirtatious, deceitful and unfaithful. But very often women appear in his poetry as victims. The love-hate, attraction-repulsion relationship, in many ways, is a reflection of the Eliot-Vivien relationship. However, none of his poems can be literally interpreted in terms of the events of Eliot’s marital problems with Vivien. Eliot himself initially denied any autobiographical intrusion in his poetry. During the W.W-I he wrote to his father:

“...everyone’s individual lives are so swallowed up in the one great tragedy that one almost ceases to have personal experiences or emotions, and such as one has seem so unimportant…I have lots of things to write about if the time ever comes when people will attend them.”\(^{22}\)

But a quite contrary opinion was made in a letter to his brother Henry about the autobiographical elements in *The Waste Land* “…to me it (*The Waste Land*) was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life, it is just a piece of

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\(^{22}\) Eliot, T. S. “*The Waste Land Drafts*”. p. XIII. (Eliot’s letter to his father during W.W-I, 23\(^{rd}\) December, 1717.)
rhythmical grumbling.”

Eliot was horrified with the abyss of life and profoundly concerned with the insidious nature of mind. One pivotal theme of his poetry, from the beginning to the end, is the violence which erupted from the conflict of love and lust; guilt and remorse; surrender and withdrawal. Although Eliot denied any autobiographical reference in his poems, his friend Conrad Aiken confirmed that Eliot appears to have caricatured both himself and the lady in the poem ‘Portrait of a Lady’. The ‘Lady’ is identified as a Boston society hostess, Adelaine or Madelaine Moffat who used to serve tea to Harvard men, “the Jamesian lady of ladies, the enchantress of the Beacon Hill drawing room…was afterwards to be essentialized and ridiculed (and his own pose with it) in the Tsetse’s [T.S. Eliot] ‘Portrait d’une Femme’.”

The poem reveals the cruelty and violence that lie beneath the surface of apparently polite drawing-room society.

I keep my countenance,
I remain self-possessed
Except when a street-piano, mechanical and tired
Reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired.

(‘Portrait of a Lady’, *Prufrock and Other Observations*)

The same note of passionate desire and withdrawal from sensuality and carnality is rung in *Gerontion’s* voice:

I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use them for your close contact?

(‘Gerontion’, *Poems*)

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In *Ash-Wednesday* Eliot’s endeavour was to move on the path of God. The agony and suffering of life is juxtaposed with his spiritual struggle, its difficulties, doubts and indecisions. In June 1927 Eliot was confirmed in the Church of England, much against the wishes of Vivien. Eliot described his attempt in the poem, as an exploration of “the experience of a man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal”. The personal note is distinctly present as the poem explores his profound sense of void and anguish and enacts the psycho-spiritual battle between two warring impulses of asceticism and carnality. Violence in life that arises out of the conflicting emotions of guilt and remorse is rendered into futility and a deep void, urging the poet to register his faith in the will of God. But his struggle yields nothing and the sense of vacuity and nothingness become heavier and ponderous. He confesses:

I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice
And pray to God to have mercy upon us.

(*Ash-Wednesday*, T.S. Eliot)

In all parts of *The Waste Land*, side by side with literal, spiritual or universal meaning, the autobiographical dimension deserves mention. Eliot’s own acknowledgement supports this view. Eliot’s bruised married life constitutes a vast part of his poetic statement.

My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak with me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think.

(‘A Game of Chess’, *The Waste Land*)

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Such sincere, passionately helpless, yet vehement outburst rings a sad, broken tune of his failure to get a peaceful shelter of love in his life. In the same poem, the persona madly rushes out in the street:

What shall I do now? What shall I do?
I shall rush out as I am and walk the street
With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
What shall we ever do?

(‗A Game of Chess‘, The Waste Land)

Though such frenzied utterances do have multitudinous connotations, the subjective state of the persona and the poet cannot be overruled altogether. After a few lines the ‘Albert-Lil’ reference comes. There is no mention of love between Albert and Lil, but only sexuality. The same is found in the episode of the city clerk and the woman typist who come to each other only for sexual gratification. There is no trace of love between them. This reflects the state of sex without love. Eliot probably questions the existence of ‘love’ through such presentation of carnal relationships without emotion, feelings, sensitivity and love.

Like Eliot, Jibanananda Das had life-long marital problems. Although Labanya was not neurotic like Vivien, Das could never fulfil her worldly demands. Bhumendra Guha gave an account of their conjugal relationship:

“Labanya Das, wife of Jibanananda brought me near the portico. She said that Achinta babu had come, Buddhadev came and Sajanikanta came so this brother of yours was surely a poet of great stature. He left behind many things for Bengali literature probably, but tell me, what he had left behind for me!”

In his poetry, Das too, like Eliot gave vent to his own helplessness, bitterness and anger. Though he took recourse to history, myth, dream and imagination, very often he becomes concerned with the odds and oddities of life he has to confront. His personal helplessness in the face of acute financial crisis is reflected in the poem ‘Kabi’:

Kabike dekhe elam

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Dekhe elam kabike
Anander kabita ekadikrome likhe chalechhe
Tabuo rojgar korbar darkar achhe tar
Keu will kare kichhu rekhe jai ni.
Chakri nei
Byabsar marpanch bojhe na se-
‘Share market e namle keman hoi’, jiggesh korle amake
Hai amake!

[The poet I met/I met the poet/He has been writing poems of joy endlessly/Yet he needs to earn/No one has made a will and left him anything/He has no job/He does not understand the strategies of business/He asked me, “What about playing the share market?/Alas, me!”]

(‘Kabi’ [The Poet])

As a worldly man Jibanananda was a failure. He could not help his family financially. Nor could he establish himself in society as a man of importance. Moreover, his introvert nature alienated him from his family and friends. He expressed his nausea in the poem ‘Andhakar’:

Amar samasta hriday ghrinai bedanai akroshe bhare giechhe
Suryer roudre akranta ei prithivi yeno koti koti shuorer
Artanade utsava suru karechhe’

[‘My whole heart is filled with hatred/For the world fermented in the heat of the sun,/Festive with the squealing of the pigs./Bursting with sordid joy’.]

(‘Andhakar’ [Darkness], Banalata Sen)


The persona’s heart is filled with nausea, anger and bitterness. He does not mention a specific reason for his protest, nor exactly what he is protesting against. But the expression reveals the tempestuous state of his battered soul as he registers his revolt against the world. This grudge may be personal or universal. But the tone is intimate and original, expressed from the heart of a deeply wounded human being. Had he been treated with love and care at home, Das perhaps would not have written lines such as these:

Badhu shue chhilo pashe – shishutio chhilo
Prem chhilo, asha chhilo – joytsnai – tabuo se dekhilo
Kon bhut? Ghum keno bhenge gelo tar?
Athaba hoi ni ghum bahukal – lashkata ghare shue ghumai ebar’

[‘Next to him lay his bride, his child;/ Yet what ghost did he see in the moonlight/ Beyond love, beyond hope? How come he awoke? / Or he had not slept for long… Now he sleeps in the morgue.]

(‘Aat Bachhar Ager Ekdin’, [One Day Eight Years Ago], Mahapritthivi[The Great Earth]29

In the above lines Das expressed his horror at the hellish state of loveless conjugal life where the persona finds his abode of peace and happiness only after his death, in ‘lashkata ghar’ (morgue). Side by side with his failure to find true love, the bitterness of physical love is reflected in the poems of Das. ‘Prem’ is a poem which echoes Eliot’s ‘Albert-Lil’ episode:

Ekdin ekrat karechhi premer sathe khela!
Ekrat ekdin korechhi mrityure abahela.
Ekdin-ekrat; tarpar prem gechhe chole,-
Sabai cholia yai, - sakalere yete hoy bole.

[One day one night I have played with love! One night one day I have defied death. One day one night; after that love has gone. All go by as all are destined to depart.]

(‘Prem’, ['Love'] Dhusar Pandulipi [Gray Manuscripts]^{30}

The nausea of an anguished life, the burden of an alienated, afflicted soul, the pain of negligence and rejection from family and society, the continuous economic struggle leading to poverty and a dissatisfied, disastrous, loveless conjugal life, gave vent to violent outburst in many of his poems. Violence in personal life is often translated into violence in poetry. This aspect of violence is vividly expressed in one of his famous poems ‘Bodh:

Sakal loker majhe bose
Amar nijer mudradose
Ami eka hotechhi alada?

Amar chokhei shudhu dhandha?
Amar chokhei shudhu badha?

…………………………………
Bhalobese dekhiachhi meyemanusere,
Abahela kore dekhiachhi meyemanusere,
Ghrina kore dekhiachhi meyemanusere;

Amare se bhalobasiachhe,
Asiachhe kachhe,
Upeksha se korechhe amare,
Ghrina kore chole gechhe – yakhun dekechhi bare bare
Bhalobese tare; ….’

[I live amongst all, yet alone;/ Am I the only one to be blinded by the light/ Puzzled by the many ways open before me?....I have known the love of woman./ Covered her

with glory, neglect, scorn;/ She has showered her love upon me/ First drawn close,
then pushed me aside in scorn, when I call her again and again with love.]

(‗Bodh‘, [Sensation/ A Certain Sense] Dhusar Pandulipi [Gray Manuscripts] \(^{31}\)

**The poets’ perspectives on socio-political, ethno-religious, historical-cultural violence**

Poetry or literature at large does not necessarily reflect political or intellectual history as its background but the spirit of the age is very often represented through verbal formations in a literary text or any kind of discourse which may be called ideological products or cultural constructs of a particular era and these ideological representations in text serve mainly to depict the power structure of domination and subordination in a given society. The 19\(^{th}\) century cultural renaissance in India gave birth to nationalism and movement for liberation from British colonial power. The struggle for emancipation continued until the country gained her independence from the foreign rulers. But the conflict between the settlers and the natives inevitably led to bloody violence as the rulers very often used ruthless force to dominate and subordinate their subjects. Therefore, resistance and armed struggle remained the only viable alternative to establish right to self-determination. This resistance of the united masses yields to violence. During nearly two hundred years of British colonial rule in India the English colonialists indulged in all sort of tortures and means of exploitation. As a result, the country’s agrarian economy was completely shattered; its small and cottage industry destroyed; a sense of subordination and servitude among people became stronger and people were reduced to almost a subhuman race. Poverty, hunger, famine and riot became the destiny of the subcontinent. The oppressors, blinded with power and greed, unknowingly enhance the process of decolonization because the tortured, exploited and plundered creatures begin to unite to resist or seek retribution. They are killed by the ruthless rulers but once the blood is shed, thousands of revolutionaries come forward to fight for their cause of justice, liberty and

humanity. Frantz Fanon’s comment about decolonization is very much pertinent in the Indian context:

“NATIONAL liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth; whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.”

Jibanananda’s major poems were composed in the backdrop of the violent extremist movement in Bengal against the British rulers in the early 20th century. Being a poet of the time Das’s poetic discourse inevitably translates the political and cultural chaos of the time.

India awakes at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century with the renaissance of Bengal. National and political consciousness developed. Political leaders began to think of people’s plight under British rule. The struggle for freedom is initiated. Enlightened India witnessed the emergence of such great philosophers, thinkers, reformers and educationists as Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Thakur, Keshab Chandra Sen, Mahadev Gobinda Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Ramkrishna Paramhamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Any Besant and Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. In literature, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Rabindranath Tagore – to name just three – emerged like the morning sun of a new day.

The economic policy of the British East India Company had turned India into a bankrupt nation. Peasants became destitute due to the Company’s indiscriminate taxation. They also destroyed India’s small and cottage industry by importing cheap industrial products. As a result more people became jobless. In this way the economic foundation of the country was destabilized. After India’s governance was handed over to the British Government in 1858, their economic policy underwent little change. Instead of relief, the exploitation of the farmers was further increased. Taxation became higher and higher. As a result of this oppressive rule and economic exploitation, rural India had to suffer from repeated famines. Millions of people died. Various types of tax were imposed upon the farmers but the government bothered least to develop the condition of agriculture. On the contrary, the British Government

spent huge sums for the railway development project because it could provide profits to the British merchants and industrialists. According to Romesh Chander Dutt, “Not content with the carrying trade between India and Europe, British manufacturers sought to repress Indian industries in order to give an impetus to British manufactures. Their great idea was to reduce India to a country of raw produce, and to make her subservient to the manufacturing industries of Great Britain.” The nationalist leaders held the government responsible for the plight of the peasants. They directly attacked the British Government by saying that their economic exploitation was responsible for the poverty and recurrent famines in the country.

The awakened and enlightened Indians started to protest. With the establishment of the Indian National Congress (1885), the organized political movement against the British starts. Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab became the centres of anti-British agitation. The movement of the Congress was divided by two distinct groups - the Moderates and the Extremists. The British Government took repressive measures to control this movement. The extremist leaders were fed up with the political mendicancy of the Moderates. Bal Gangadhar Tilak said, “Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it.” Tilak, Lala Lajpath Ray, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh took leading roles in organizing the extremist movement. The extremist movement gets a new momentum when Lord Curzon decided to divide Bengal (1905). His purpose was divisive and communal. He wanted to destroy the peace and harmony of Bengal to weaken the movement. The whole of Bengal became turbulent with rage and anger against Curzon’s policy. The Moderate leaders appealed to their countrymen to join the ‘Boycott’ and ‘Swadeshi’ movement. On the other hand, the extremist leaders started armed struggle against the oppressive, tyrannical rule of the imperialist British power. The heroic self-sacrifice of such freedom fighters as Khudiram Basu, Prafulla Chaki, Binoy Basu, Badal Basu Dinesh Gupta, Surya Sen, Asfakulla Khan, Jatin Das, Preetilata Waddedar, Batukeshwar Dutta and Bhagat Singh created a thrilling sensation among the Indians. The people of the country became conscious of their right to self-determination. From the first decade of the twentieth century, the Indian freedom movement became more and more violent.

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and bloody. The British Government also became desperate and reckless. It passed the oppressive Rowlatt Acts (1914). Gandhiji appealed to the country to protest against this draconian law and addressed people to join in the ‘Non-violent, Non-co-operation’ movement. People, throughout the country, were awakened and took oaths to fight the British. Amidst this tumultuous political situation, the extremist armed struggle became more and more violent. People began to dream of independent India. In the meantime the First World War (1914-1918) starts in Europe and England was involved in the war as major participant country, against the Central power. As Britain was involved in the Great War, they needed more money and man power. India became the most important resourceful colony for these supplies. Taxes were imposed indiscriminately upon the peasants and the Indian youths were being recruited in the army. The slump, leading to poverty and famine, made people’s life intolerable. The turbulent state of both national and international politics had a decisive impact on national literature. Imbued with nationalistic fervour, poets and writers wrote patriotic literature. The zeal for liberty made poets vocal against the tyrannical and oppressive colonial power. During first two decades of twentieth century protest literature emerged as the most popular form of literature. Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendra Lal Roy, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Mohitlal Majumdar Satyendranath Dutta came forward to compose patriotic literature.

In 1939 when the World War-II broke out, India, as a part of the British Empire became involved in it. The holocaust of war and its destruction of human values shattered the very basis of western civilization. India, as a part of the British Empire was directly involved in the war which drove the country further to poverty and famine. In 1941 Rabindranath Tagore passed away in the back-drop of a war-torn world. In 1942, the Quit India movement of the National Congress, arrest of the national leaders and the August agitation took place, but the British atrocities continued as ruthlessly as ever. In the meantime Netaji’s formation of the Azad Hind Army and his declaration of the Azad Hind Government created new hope and enthusiasm in the mind of the freedom fighters. In 1946 Gandhiji tried to come to a compromise with Mahammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, but in vain. In 1947 India was divided into two separate countries on the basis of ‘two-nation’ theory. On 15th August, 1947 the British Government declared independence of two countries – India and Pakistan.
In comparison with the 19th century renaissance and early 20th century resistance against the British Imperialists in India, Europe was a boiling cauldron. Since French Revolution (1789) Europe had been witnessing violence and struggles and wars among people and nations. The Glorious Revolution (1688) and the subsequent legislations in England may open up the golden avenues of Parliamentary democracy in England, yet it remained a national affair. But the French Revolution (1789) rocked the whole Europe with its philanthropic, humanitarian ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. It sent a thrill of fresh air through the whole civilized world. It came as a prophecy of a new day, and for the moment it seemed it would leave behind all the evils and corruptions of the past and usher humanity in an era of realized democratic ideals and humanity. Since 1789, the first half of the 19th century, the European countries fought and struggled to establish their individual supremacy over others. Austria, Prussia, Spain, Russia, England and France – all these countries were involved in Napoleonic wars. After Napoleon’s fall in the war of Waterloo (1815) the monarchs of Europe unitedly tried to suppress the ideals Revolutions. In the treaty of Vienna (1815) people’s democratic rights were withdrawn and autocracy was imposed upon the people of Europe again. But in the meantime people had tasted the fruits of democracy and it was not therefore, possible for the kings of Europe to destroy the ideals of democracy forever. July Revolution (1830) and February Revolution (1848) established republic in France. Great 19th century English poets were heavily influenced by the political and intellectual upheaval. Poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Byron and Shelley hailed the new era of democracy and liberty.

The first half of the twentieth century is marked by violence and mass war; turmoil and anarchic unrest; revolution and counter-revolution; liberation and occupation; an unprecedented economic crisis and the apocalyptic ascension of Hitler and Fascism. Germany became a potential threat to the English naval supremacy. The Edwardian Age (1901-1910), though apparently looked calm and peaceful, was in fact, arrested by a deadly silence immediate before a cyclonic wind. And in no time the First World War starts (1914). The War continued for a long six years and the whole Europe was turned into a slaughter-house. The fundamental bases of Western culture and values were completely shattered by the blood-shed, carnage and destruction. The inhumanity and brutality of the War had brought about a great
vacuum and emptiness in the life of the people as it destroyed all ideals and values of life. This had acted upon the life of Europe so much so that the very matrix of European thought and attitude to life was radically transformed. In this regard Hobsbawm’s comment is more than appropriate:

“…the great edifice of the nineteenth century civilization crumpled in the flames of world war, as its pillars collapsed. There is no understanding of the short twentieth century without it. It was marked by war. It lived and thought in terms of world war, even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not exploding.”

The Great War (1914-1919) was followed by a variety of new beginnings and rejections of the past. This new beginning took place in almost all aspects of life – social, political, cultural, economic, religious, scientific, literary and even personal and familial. T. S. Eliot wrote in 1923 in a review of James Joyace’s, (1882-1941) Ulysses (1922) that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” In this regard I.A.Richards makes a pertinent comment:

“A sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavour and a thirst for a life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed, are the signs in consciousness of this necessary reorganization of our lives”.

W. B. Yeats’ declaration in ‘The Second Coming’ summed up the chaos and cultural disintegration that prevailed upon the West: ‘Things fall apart; the centre can not hold, / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.’


Both industrial and traditional agrarian economies of the Western belligerent countries were shattered due to the mass mobilization in war. In the First World War Britain mobilized 12.5 per cent of its men, France almost 17 per cent, Germany 15.4 per cent. In the Second World War the percentage of the total active labour force that went in the armed forces was pretty generally in the neighborhood of 20 percent (Milward, Alan – *War, Economy and Society 1939-1945*, London, 1979). This put enormous pressure on the labour force, leading to the breakdown of the production system. This resulted in the large-scale poverty, unemployment, social unrest and discontent among the non-combatants. But this also strengthened the powers of organized labour and produced a revolution in the employment of women outside the household. This disaster happened due to the lack of any long term, organized physical planning. Moreover, the war destroyed huge quantities of capital assets leading to the unprecedented fall of economic growth, in almost all the combatant countries, except U.S.A.

The human impact of the era of wars was vaster than the human brain could ever imagine. In both the World Wars the Western front became a machine for massacre and mass extermination. In both the Wars millions of people were killed and millions were maimed permanently. The traumatic experience of the mindless massacre paralyzed the psychic domain of the survived masses. Their feelings and sensitivities were lost. The lack of faith among the warring nations and their hatred for each other killed the very bases of human soul. Mutual co-operation, love and fellow-feeling were gone. In the First World War almost all the major powers were involved, except Spain, the Netherlands, the three Scandinavian countries and Switzerland. Moreover troops from the world overseas were, sent to fight. Canadian fought in France. Australia and New Zealand were drawn to the entanglement, and more significantly, U.S.A rejected George Washington’s warning against ‘European entanglements’ and sent its men to fight there – thus determining the shape of the twentieth century history. Indian, Chinese, and soldiers from the Middle East came to fight, Africans fought in the French army. In the Second World War virtually all independent states of the world were involved willingly or unwillingly, although the Republics of South America participated almost in the most nominal manner. The
peace-settlement of Versailles (1919) which was imposed upon Germany by the victorious power could not be the basis of a stable peace. It was doomed from the start, and another war was therefore, practically certain. The treaty was based upon the victor power’s policy of keeping Germany feeble and weak for ever. For this they imposed vast undefined payments on Germany as ‘reparations’ for the cost of the war and the damage done to the victorious power. To justify these, a clause had also been inserted into the peace treaty making Germany solely responsible for the war (the so-called war-guilt clause) which was both historically doubtful and proved to be a gift to German nationalism. The repressive measures of the victor powers paved the path of Hitler’s ascension. With the ascension of Fascism in Italy (1922-1928) and Germany (1932-1933) in one side and the spread of socialist movements, after the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) in Russia, on the other side, the budding European liberal democracy was at stake. Hobsbawm mentions the main characteristics of Fascism:

“The Fascists were nationalists and xenophobic, idealizing war and violence, intolerant and given to strong-arm coercion, passionately anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-proletarian, anti-socialist and anti-rationalist dreaming of blood and soil and a return to the values which modernity was disrupting.”

The novelty of Fascism and Nazism was that, once in power, it refused to play the old games, and took over completely where it could. The total transfer of power or the eliminations of rivals, and the establishment of untrammeled dictatorship of a supreme populist leader (Fuhrer) was the ideal of Fascism and this had happened in Italy and Germany. Amidst internal and transnational political as well as economic turmoil, ideals of ultra-Right nationalism and Leftist communism gained popularity which threatened the existence of liberal democracy in all Europe. The hate philosophy of Hitler’s anti-semitism led to mass extermination of the Jews. His repulsion for the Jews can be understood from his own statement:

“The life which the Jew lives as a parasite thriving on the substance of other nations and states has resulted in developing that specific character which Schopenhaur once described when he spoke of the Jew as ‘The Great Master

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of Lies’. The kind of existence which he leads forces the Jew to the systematic use of falsehood…”  

Nazi dictatorship, its racial hatred and the vast holocaust it inflicted upon the world is summed up by Ian Kershaw:

“In Nazism we have a phenomenon which seems scarcely capable of subjection to national analysis. Under a leader who talked of apocalyptic tones of world power or destruction and a regime founded on an utterly repulsive ideology of race hatred, one of the most culturally and economically advanced countries of Europe planned for war, launched a world conflagration which killed around 50 million, and perpetrated atrocities culminating in the mechanized mass murder of millions of Jews – of a nature and scale as to defy imagination.”  

How can a poet, being a part of such time, escape the heat and fire of the wars and the ideological chaos which breed that chaos of hatred and violence? This is almost impossible. And Eliot, one of the greatest poets of the last century, encompasses both the Great Wars. Therefore, there remains enough similarity of political, cultural perspectives between Europe and Indian sub-continent against which the poems of both Eliot and Das are composed and interestingly enough, both the poets are contemporary to each other. The violence of the world, both of past and present, has been translated into violence in their poetry. Cultural clashes, political violence and religious conflicts have been a recurrent theme in the poems of both Eliot and Das. Both the poets believed in the amalgamation of tradition and individual talents. The atrocities of past and present are presented by both as a single version of historical violence that merely repeat itself throughout centuries. The diachronic comparative reading of their poetic discourse would reveal violence of the world as one of the major driving motive forces in their poetry.

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Socio-political and cultural violence are vast comprehensive phenomena which manifest in almost all spheres of Eliot’s poetry. Of course, he often takes the guise of history, myth, religion and rhetoric to conceal these subversive forces and maintains objectivity and distance. Eliot’s comprehensive poetic statement intensifies the hidden violence and chaos underlying the diverse socio-political and cultural dimensions. Cultural violence in Eliot’s poem encompasses both the history past and history present. Like Eliot, Das also bears the legacy of rendering the socio-political and cultural violence into one of his potential forces of poetry. He also takes the guise of history, myth and rhetoric for achieving poetic effect. In his poetry, like Eliot, past and present become one single version of futility, anarchy and chaos.

The nature of socio-political violence in both Eliot and Das is almost similar, though the perspectives are different. European cultural ethos, historical perspective and socio-political phenomena are huge and vaster and marked by extreme violence and intolerance. Conflicts, chaos and war pervade the years of Eliot’s poetic life, from the First World War to the end of the World War-II, in 1945. Similarly, Das experiences the slavery, bondage and agony of a subdued nation. He was deeply moved by hunger, poverty, war, famine and riot. Most of the great poems of Das are composed during the same decades as were Eliot’s who too, was deeply disturbed by the cultural chaos of Europe.

Social, political and cultural violence are inter-related and highly composite phenomena. They appear all through the poems of Eliot and Das. Though the nature and character of violence in their poems have apparent differences owing to the cultural and civilizational differences, there are intrinsic similarities of violence in many of their poems. Violence in Eliot’s poems encompasses the whole range of human history, from pre-historic time to the twentieth century. Das also drove back to the dim and distant past and experienced the disorder and chaos in the universal order of existence where physical force determines the socio-political order and stability. Eliot hints at the crude, brutal, demonic force of violence when he alludes to the gruesome, horrible history of John the Baptist’s decapitation by king Herod, in the following lines: ‘There will be time to murder and create/ And time for all the works and days of hands/ That lift and drop a question on your plate.’ (‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, Prufrock and Other Observations, 1917). Of course, numerous
other ethos are embedded in the expression which render the lines’ semantics to infinite nuances of meanings and suggestions. The mythical allusion is fraught with more than one critical ideas – psycho-sexual, religious, political and also feminist. John the Baptist was a spiritualist, a sage who can not compromise either to his ideal or to his religious faith. Therefore, he censures Herod’s marriage with Herodotus on the ground of incest because Herod married his own brother’s widow. On the other hand, Salome, the daughter of Herodias loved John the Baptist who rejected the offer. The declaration of Herod’s marriage as illegitimate incurred his anger and at the same time Salome also wished his punishment because of the rejection of her offer of love. Herod ordered to bring the head of John the Baptist and the head was brought to her on a plate as a reward for her dancing before the king. The brutal murder of John the Baptist has political, religious and sexual dimensions of meaning. This prismatic multi-dimensional rendering of Eliot’s poetic discourse led the critics and commentators to level the charge of obscurity against him. But the fact is that Eliot did never consciously endeavour to do this. His poetry remains open-ended, presenting the baffling enigma of universe and the dark recesses of human soul. The violent act of the monk’s murder and the related other innumerable issues can not explain the state of affairs rather lead us to unnumbered ‘undecidable’ possibilities. Therefore, Eliot’s concern is not the narration of factual events to create decisive meaning but to throw light on the dark and primitive impulses of sex and blood over a shadowy, ghostly, dreadful, barren physical world. Eliot’s contention is that this happened in the past, happening in present and will continue to happen in future. Sexual-political violence of past and contemporary is very often translated in his poetry through myth, legend and history. When he writes ‘No! I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be. / Am an attended lord…’ (‘Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’), he alludes to the whole history of treachery, incest, murder, revenge leading to the fatal catastrophe of bloody death of all the members of the royal family of Elisnore and also those closely related to them, including Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia. Similarly, Das also hints at the same history of political violence when he says:

Ei prithibir ranarakta sahalata
Satya; tabu shesh satya noy.

.............................................
Ajke anek rura roudre ghure pran
Prithibir manuske manusher mato
Bhalobasa dite giye tabu,
Dekhechhi amari hate hoyto nihata
Bhaibon bandhu parijan pare achhe;
Prithibir gavir gavirataro ashukh ekhun;
Manush tabuo rini manusheri kachhe.

[‘The world’s blood and toil and glory/ Are true; yet the last truth they are not…..I have striven, worn my feet roving. / Seeking to give man what belongs to him, / And I am weary roving in the burning sun of day. / Yet so striving to love man…..I see man, my own flesh and blood, / Strewn around dead, killed by my own hand. / The world is sick and in pain, / Yet we are its debtors, and shall remain.’]

(‗Suchetana‘, Banalata Sen.)

The poet speaks of deadly deep-rooted disease of the earth. And at the beginning he gives enough indication that he is talking of the madness of war that kills millions of human beings for meaningless victory. He also declares that the the success of the war-mongers are temporary and not the final truth. The poet is horrified at the fact of killing the fellow human beings, the brothers and sisters or the nearest neighbour or relative for gaining vain temporary success. Or, elsewhere more directly he refers to the political violence from history:

Itihas ardhasatyay kamachhanya ekhono kaler kinarai
Tabuo manush ei jibanke bhalobase; manusher man
jibaner mane: sakoler bhala kare jibanjapan.
Kintu sei shubha rastra bahu dure aj.
Charidike bikalango andha bhid- alik prayan.
Mannantar shesh Hale punarai nabamannantar;

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The poet laments over the utter failure of the mission of welfare state. He states that love, fellow feeling and benevolence are lost and lust, famine, ferocity and war come as a ruling roost. Though the mode of presentation differs, both Eliot and Das speaks of the continuity of violence throughout history. Of course, like Eliot Das does not always end in despair, hopelessness and irresolution. The ambivalence between hope and hopelessness, optimism and pessimism is one of the major characteristics of Das’s poetry.

In ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ we are presented with immediate experience of a violent physical world which evokes memories of past, the subconscious self of the personae or of the race. The difference between past and present is blurred. The past memories are as real as immediate memories. Thus ‘street lamp’ and beating of the ‘fatalistic drum’ become a lone version of repeated events, perspective-less panorama, a collage or a cubic painting of Picasso or Braque. Here too, we find

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Eliot’s preoccupation with the co-existence of past and present, both of which are dark, gloomy and fatal. The chaos and anarchy of human psyche and the instinctive primordial savagery are unveiled through a number of sordid images.

Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ provides Eliot with the stimulus and inspiration to take a long and troublesome voyage into the dark, gloomy and mysterious sea of human psyche. Words and images in ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ evoke the savagery, anarchy, disorder of human psyche and soul. When we call up the moment of wilderness whispering to Kurtz in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Marlow’s listening to drums beating in the night, we may easily trace the source of the poem. ‘Heart of Darkness’ had always been Eliot’s major preoccupation for its evocation of evil and darkness of African wilderness as well as human psyche, the nature of which is never changed. In his ‘Rhapsody’ too, the moonlight and the misty haloes of the lamplight throw up images and objects from memory which likewise illuminate the present:

Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

(‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, Prufrock and Other Observations, 1917)

The reference to “Heart of Darkness” recurs again and again in Eliot’s poems, like The Waste Land and The Hollow Men. The continuation of this is noteworthy and the purpose is the evocation of evil. The nausea which the persona expresses in responding to the immediate world is presented through the image of a cat, lapping up ‘rancid butter’- a useless gesture, contrasted with the automatic grabbing action of a child at a toy, connotatively useless. The floor of the storehouse of memory dissolve and, from the third fragment, we see the objects which pour out: ‘a crowd of twisted things,’ ‘a twisted branch,’ ‘a broken spring’ and finally the irony of the last line, ‘the last twist of the knife’- rusty, useless, lifeless objects. The associations of these objects are juxtaposed with those of the objects from the immediate sensory world, experienced through the image of the torn, stained dress of a woman where eye is also twisted. Two set of images share the connotation which useless, lifeless and
'junkyard' objects present. Memory throws up more images of sordid, diseased physical world. The images are vivid, violent and vigorous, like ‘female smell’, ‘cigarettes in corridors’ and madman shaking ‘a dead geranium’.

The same dramatization of the sordid physical world and the barrenness and sterility of psychic spiritual state of human soul is presented through some lines of a quite obscure poem of Das:

Tramer liner path dhore hanti; ekhun gavir raat
Kobekar kon se jiban yano titkiri diye yai
Tumi yano rod bhanga tram ek- depot nai, mujurir proyojan nai
Kakhon eman hole hai.

[I walk along the tram line; night now deep/ I hear the teasing of some life of the past; / You are like a broke tram – there is no depot, no need of wage/ Alas, when has this occurred!]

(‘Tramer liner path dhore’ [Along the Tram Line], Uncollected Poems.)

Although less forceful and less allusive than Eliot, Das presents the broken and bizarre world of loneliness, failure, fatigue and a strong sense of nausea. The reference to rusty, almost forgotten past ‘Kabekar koun se jiban’ connects the present failure in the image of ‘rod bhanga tram’ having no ‘depot’.

Eliot’s another great poem ‘Sweeney among the Nightingales’ (1918) does not merely create ‘a sense of foreboding’ as F.O.Mattheissen quotes it from Eliot, the significance of the poem widens far more than that. It includes a number of literary and mythical allusions through which Eliot tends to telescope past as well as present, to suggest the recurrence of violence, treachery, betrayal and butchery throughout centuries. Here also past and present become a single version of same bloody violence. The atmosphere of conspiracy which it holds up among savage characters in an ill-famous rendezvous is paralleled with the intrigue and violence of the Greek legend.


The title echoes Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s ‘Bianca among the Nightingales’ which concludes with violent repulsion and hatred, death and doom. The singing of the nightingales with callousness and cruelty connects the treacherous murder of Agamemnon in the epigraph which are the last words of Agamemnon when his wife Clytemnestra murders him, in Agamemnon by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus. The English rendering of the epigraph is: ‘Alas, I am struck deep with a mortal blow’. The last stanza dramatizes the theme of the epigraph: Thereby it suggests the situation of Sweeney who is mockingly compared to the great Greek hero. However, Sweeney’s fate is same as Agamemnon’s. The epigraph epitomizes the whole drama of the great Trojan War fought between the Greeks and the Trojans. Agamemnon was the commander-in-chief of the Greek army. He was boastful, braggart and lustful. After the victory in the Trojan War he brought the gifted daughter of Prium, Cassandra, to Argos. He had least respect for his conjugal life. His wife Clytemnestra, too, betrayed him by an illicit relationship with Aegisthus and murdered him at his arrival. Cassandra is likened to nightingales in the play. The reference also alludes to the Tereus-Philomela myth, because Cassandra wished to be transferred and released like Philomela, from the infernal horror of the Atreus family. So the focal point of the poem is the violence, intrigue and bloodshed, both in past and at present. The situation is aptly explained by P.G. Mudford in the following comment:

“…the power and suggestiveness of the poem is extra-ordinary; it succeeds in making concrete that area of the mind where the sacred and profane are uneasy companions of everyday affairs; and communicates how the appearance of these conflicts is transferred by the social context into which it erupts. What in the world of Greek tragedy meant the fall of a royal house had become at the end of the First World War a chimerical and pervasive darkness that menaced a man from within.”

That man is prey to his primitive instinct, is unfolded by Das in his ‘Kampe’, one of his most controversial poems. Although his use of allusions and references is

not as powerful as Eliot, Das makes use of innovative symbols and images to serve his purpose. Like Eliot’s ‘Sweeney…’ poem ‘Kampe’ is also steeped in sexual violence. The theme of carnality and sexuality is manifested through different innovative symbols and images. Moreover, treachery, cruelty, betrayal and brutality are also objectively manifested through such beautiful symbols as ‘harin’, ‘mrigi’, ‘shikar’, ‘mangser ghran’. Romanticism of love is almost vanished, what remains is a menacing sense of tooth and nail, flesh and blood, lust and sensuality. How innocence is violated in the poem can easily be noted if we look through the poem:

Kothao harin aaj hotechhe shikar;
Baner bhitare aaj shikarira asiachhe,
Amio tader ghran pai yeno
Eikhane bichhanai sue sue
Ghum ar asenako
Basanter rate.
……………………………………
Lalasa akankha saad-prem-swapna spasta hoe uthitechhe sabdike
Aaj ei basanter rate.
……………………………………………………………………
Eke eke hariner asitechhe gavir baner path chhere,
Sakal jaler shabda pichhe phele anya ek ashwaser khonje
Danter nokher katha bhule giye tader boner kachhe oi
Sundari gachher niche- joytsnai!
Manus yeman kore ase tar nona meye manuser kachhe
Hariner asitechhe.

Kal mrigi asibe phiria;
Sakale aloi tare dekha yabe-
Pashe tar mrita premikera pade achhe.
Manusera take shikhae diechhe tare ei sab!
Amar khabar dishe hariner mangsher ghran ami pabo,
…..Mangsha khaoa holo tabo shes?
…Keno shes hobe?
Keno oi mrigider katha bhebe batha pete hobe
How innocence and purity are butchered can be seen more explicitly in the poem ‘Shikar’:

Sarat chitabaghinir haat theke nijke banchie banchie
Nakshatrahin, mehgonir moto andhakare sundarir ban theke
Arjuner bane ghure ghure
Sundar badami harin ei borer janya apeksha karchhilo.

………………………………………………………………………………

Ekta adhut shabda.
Nadir jal machkafuler mato lal.
Agun jallo abar-usno lal hariner mangso toire hoye elo.
Nakshatrer niche ghaser bichhanai bose anek purono shishir veja galpo;
Cigaretter dhoan;
Terikata kayekti manusher matha;
Elomelo kayekta banduk-him-nispanda niraparadh ghum.

[All night long a handsome nut-brown buck, bounding from sundari through arjun forest/ In starless, mahogany-like darkness, avoids the cheetah's grasp—/ He'd been waiting for this dawn…….A strange sound./ The river's water scarlet like machka flower petals./ Again the fire crackled—red venison served hot./ Many an old dampened yarn, while seated on a bed of grass beneath the stars./ Cigarette smoke./ Several human heads, hair neatly parted./ Guns here and there. Icy, calm, guiltless sleep.]

(‗Shikar‘ [The Hunt], Banalata Sen) 47

Here neither Agamemnon nor any great hero from Indian myth and legend appear, but ‘Harin’ is presented as a recurrent symbol of innocence and beauty which is butchered. Anarchy and darkness, blood and butchery, heighten the gravity of the poem. The ‘deer’, (harin) suggestive of innocence, is a prey to leopardess. The leopardess runs after the deer to kill and devour it and the deer tries desperately to escape from the beast of prey. The symbol of ‘deer’ and ‘leopardess’ has multifarious connotations. Leopardess may be the symbol of evil and ferocity in woman, as we find in Clytemnestra, leading to sexual perversion and betrayal, culminating to the physical assault and murder of the lover and husband. Sexual betrayal and murder happened in the past and is happening at present. The result is total disorder and chaos in man-woman relationship. This may also indicate the insidious nature of human psyche which both Eliot and Das tried to recapture through symbolic presentations in their respective poems. The symbolic suggestion of ‘blood’, ‘venison’, ‘smoke of cigarette’ and ‘rifle’, fortify the tone and temper of violence in the poem.

In Eliot violence is very often objectively presented whereas in Das’s poetry it has been translated directly or presented through concrete examples of past and present. In Eliot’s poetry abstract gets shaped and concretized by means of plethora of innovative techniques, Das also modernized Bengali poetry by a number of bold, innovative techniques and styles. He rescued Bengali poetry from the colossal shadow of Tagorean practice. He brought about a fresh lease of life to Bengali poetry. He uses some fantastic images and symbols and also various other modern innovative styles which have neither any predecessors nor any followers. His surrealistic methods helped to bring home the huge treasures of Bengali poetry. Like Eliot, Das also universalizes socio-political and cultural violence through concrete and specific allusions, references or anecdotes from history, myth and legend. Eliot’s religious stand is orthodox Christianity which turned him to an anti-Semite but Das spoke of mutual respect to all religions. He vehemently criticized religious intolerance and championed the cause of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. But whatever may be their respective religious attitude, violence pervades the poetry of both the poets. Cultural and political violence have been a major theme throughout Eliot’s poetry. His poetic statement of recurrent anti-semitism has been severely criticized and condemned by many critics and commentators. In the epigraph of his ‘Portrait of a Lady’ anti-semitism is nakedly presented:

Thou hast committed-
Fornication: but that was in another county
And besides the wench is dead.

The epigraph alludes to the whole context of Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*. Racial hatred and cultural apathy that very often lie beneath the polish surface of apparently civilized society is presented through the ‘Portrait of a Lady’. The same voice is heard in Das when he says:

Sristir maner katha mane hoi-des.
Sristir maner katha: amaderi antarikatate
Amaderi sandeher chhayapath tene ene
byatha khunje ana. Prakitir pahade pathore samuchhal
Jharnar jal dekhe tarpur hridaye takiye
Dekhechhi pratham jal nihota pranir rakte lal

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Hoye achhe bale bagh hariner pichhu ajo dhai;
Manush merechhi ami-tar rakte amar sharir
Vore gechhe; prithibir pathe ei nihata vratar
Bhai ami; amake se kanister moto yene tabu
Hridaye kathin hoye badh kore gelo, ami raktakta nadir
Kalloler kachhe sue agrajapratim bimadake
Badh kore ghumatechhi.

[The inner thoughts of creation, it seems, are-enmity.
The inner thoughts of creation: the dragging of a shadow of
our doubts over our sincerity and thus bringing us pain.
We see a fountain of water gush forth from nature's
Mountains and stones and then we gaze into our hearts
And see that because the first water is red with the blood of the slain,
The tiger is still today chasing after the deer;
I have killed man-my body is filled with his
Blood; I am the brother of this fallen brother

On the paths of the world; he considered me his younger brother
Yet the heart hardened and he felled me, and I lie
Sleeping beside the bloody swells in this river, having slain
The ignorant one who was like an elder sibling-burying their heads
In his narrow chest ]

(‗1946-47’, Shrestho Kobita [Best Poems])

Although they remain poles apart regarding their attitude to religious faith as well as their practice, in the above poem Das expresses his overwhelming sense of agony, pity and remorse at the havoc loss of human life and human values in Hindu-Muslim riot. He is profoundly disturbed by the primitive impulses of sex and blood which prompt man to kill his fellow human beings without any apparent reason. Das’s vision

thus surpasses the purview of narrow religious identity. His humanitarian vision upholds the broad Indian cultural outlook. As a diehard puritan and a dynamic poet Eliot’s observation and view of life always remain ambivalent. His poetic statements against the Jew establish him as a professed Jew-hater. At the same time, he strongly criticizes racism. In ‘Gerontion’ the Jews are presented in a disgraceful way:

And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.

The attack becomes more savage and violent in ‘Burbank with Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’:

...On the Rialto once

The rats are underneath the piles
The Jew is underneath the lot
Money in furs, the boatman smiles”

Eliot’s anti-Semitic racial hatred is nakedly exposed by Anthony Julius. In an article in The Guardian (July-2007) he wrote:

“T. S. Eliot was not a typical anti-Semite. He was instead an extra-ordinary anti-Semite. He did not reflect the anti-Semitism of his times, he contributed to it, even enlarged it. And with these poems he exhausted anti-Semitism’s (very modest) poetry-making reserves. So did not persist in his anti-Semitism as a poet. He did not repeat himself in this way.

.... I am referring here, of course, only to the five poems that I identify in the book as anti-Semitic, not the whole of Eliot’s poetic output. These are the poems: “Burbank”, “Sweeney among the Nightingales”, “Cooking Egg” and the posthumously published “Dirge”. I regard Eliot’s purpose in writing them to be the exploitation of anti-Semitic discourse, a view of them is constituted with the limited number, and with the comprehensiveness of their address of anti-Semitic preoccupations. Eliot’s offence lies in his willingness to give offence, in his deployment of anti-Semitic language”49.

Eliot, writes Julius, was the kind of anti-Semite:

“…who was able to place his anti-Semitism at the service of his art. Anti-Semitism supplied part of the material out of which he created poetry. I do not ask the biographical question: “What made Eliot an anti-Semite? Instead I ask of what was Eliot’s anti-Semitism made, and what did Eliot make out of anti-Semitism?”

To accuse Eliot, Julius further comments, “Writing an anti-Semitic poem does not reflect the anti-Semitism of the times; it enlarges it, adding to the sum of its instances, Eliot’s work contributed to the anti-Semitism of the times.” Assessing his anti-Semitic poetic statements, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the sharpness of his literary wit very often came at the expense of either the Jews or the fair sex. Julius’s view may be debatable, but his arguments cannot be refuted altogether. On the contrary, Eliot’s criticism of racial hatred finds place in many of his poems. A concrete example is the reference to Marie in ‘Burial of the Dead’ (ll.12-18, The Waste Land) where she boastfully proclaims her racial purity:

Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’aus Litauen, ectdeutsch
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke’s
My cousin’s, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains there you would feel free.
I read much of the night and go south in the winter.

The passage alludes to My Past (1913), the reminiscences of Countess Marie Larisch, who was a niece and confidante of the Austrian Empress Elisabeth. Valerie Eliot records that Eliot had a conversation with the countess, and that his description of the sledding, for example, was taken verbatim from that conversation (T.W.L.Drafts.pp-125-26). The quotation from Marie’s conversation is a criticism of her racism and the

51 Ibid., P- 33.
German idea of pure Aryan blood. This reflects the dark and sinister political climate of the time which finally culminated in the extermination of the Jews by Adolf Hitler. What is presented in the context is not, however, Eliot’s subjective opinion but the European cultural decadence leading to violent breaking up of the whole continent. Towards the last decades of his life Eliot consciously and conscientiously endeavoured to distance himself from the fanaticism and anti-Semitism of Charles Mauras. In a letter of 13th August, 1954 he rebuffed Ezra Pound, saying he “would tolerate no further insult either to his nationality or to his religion, which included the Jewish religion.” Whatever may be Eliot’s position regarding racism and anti-Semitism, religious conflicts and cultural clash have become one of the major issues of Eliot’s poetic statement.

Like Eliot, in Das’s poems too, we find same social unrest, religious intolerance, political conflicts and cultural clashes, though the nature of the violence is different in many ways, owing to the difference in their respective cultures. Like many of the European poets and dramatists Das is never accused of practicing religious intolerance and fanaticism. Rather he is a preacher of universal brotherhood and love. Eliot has been accused by many as Jew-hater. Contrary to this, Das speaks of the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and fellow-feeling. But whatever may be his stated position, the communal riot of the 40s reminds one the Jew-Christian conflicts in Europe. In ‘1946-47’ Das vehemently attacked religious fanaticism and denounced hatred and violence. Das expresses his pity, agony and remorse at the huge loss of human values.

European decadence and cultural fragmentation are reflected in Marie’s conversation (‘The Burial of the Dead’, The Waste Land). This may be fittingly compared to Das’s ‘Prithibilok’:

Dure kachhe kebali nagar, ghar, bhanje;
Gram pataner shabda hoi;
Manusera dher yug kataye diyechhe prithibite,
Deale tader chhaya tabu
Khati, mrityu, bhoi,
Bihablata bale mane hoi.

[Near and far, cities and homes collapse/ The sound of villages falling down, rises./ Man has lived long on earth; / Yet his shadow on the wall/ Seems only to signal/ Death, loss and fear.]

(‘Prithiviloke’ [Near and Far], The Best Poems)\(^3\)

This has its equivalent in the first four lines of Eliot’s ‘East Coker’:

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory or a by-pass.

(‘East Coker-1’, Four Quartets)

Again, in ‘Gerontion’ Eliot presents the decadent, fragmented and dilapidated state of anarchic Europe which had become spiritually sterile, ethically depraved, economically bankrupt and intellectually suicidal, through the symbol of ‘house’. “My house is a decayed house” (‘Gerontion’). C.K.Stead further elaborated the meaning of the symbol of ‘house’. According to him:

“The house of which Gerontion speaks seems variously his own (rented) house, turned brothel, his body, the decaying house in which his soul is prostituted and the body of a woman turned prostitute.”\(^4\)

War and violence of past is presented through the poem:

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt, heaving a cutlass

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Bitten by flies fought.

(‘Gerontion’, Poems-1920)

This recalls the brutality and ugliness of the heroic battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C), fought by Leonides, the Spartan against a huge army of the Persian king Xerex. The prime importance of the allusion lays not so much in Gerontion’s sense of failure to participate in any such ‘heroic’ achievement like Leonides, but on the duplicities of history and the scar of war left behind on thousands and millions of innocent people. Along with this predominating sense, the poem presents the deceptions of passion as well as difficulties of belief, leading the persona to reduce to ‘A dull head among the windy spaces’. The violence of the past is instantly connected to the present, the violence of the First World War, where Eliot attempted to enroll in the military, but failed. The duplicities of history is presented when Eliot says,

After such knowledge what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities.

The knowledge is too ponderous to bear with. The unforgiving crime of bloodshed and holocaust, the treachery and conspiracy, the ambition and vanity of the boastful statesmen led to mass extermination, in past as well as in the two World Wars. The poet lashes at the dealers of death and the war-mongers. The same idea is expressed by Das in ‘Ei Sab Dinratri’ as discussed earlier (p-37-38).

Similarly, the insanity and mindless boasting of so-called heroism of war is denounced by Eliot:

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

(Gerontion, Poems)

Is not it enough proof of Eliot’s condemnation of war and violence, loathsome cruelty of genocide and mass murder, in the name of nationalism and heroism? Das expresses the same disregard for political violence even more explicitly when he says:
Rastraniti kamanakelir chukti sab;
E chhada e sab desh jati adhinayaker prane
Kothao prerana nei-dihti nei;
Aaj ei adhunik dine samay ki kaj hote pare
Se gjan haraye ora antahin hetuhin samyer hate
Sab bhul suddha hobe bhebe
Abachetanai plan gade, pact kare.
Samayer bapto chorabalis bhitare dube jai.

[State policy is the treaty of lustful desire. Except this there is no inspiration, no light in the life of the statesman. They have lost the sense of what can be done in this modern age and give in to the unreasonable eternity all their blunders. In their subconscious mind they make plan and pact and are drowned in the quick-sand of time.]

(‘Akashe Raat’, [Night in the Sky] )

The cruelty and ferocity of the bloody battles of past and present are referred to in the concluding part of ‘The Burial of the Dead’:

‘You who were with me in the ships of Mylae !
‘That corpse that you planted last year in your garden,
‘Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
‘Or has the garden frost disturbed its bed?
‘Oh keep the dog far hence, that’s a friend of men,
‘Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
‘You! hypocrite lecteur!-mon semblable,- mon frere!’

(The Waste Land)

The battle of Mylae (260 B.C) was fought between Rome and Carthage on the north coast of Sicily. The reference to Mylae suggests the continuity of past and present.

The battle of Mylae is implicitly connected to the First World War. Unnumbered unresolved questions are associated with each of the words and expressions of Eliot. So it is almost impossible to discuss and analyze Eliot’s poems from a specific, single point of view. Time, place, and identity—all get mixed up and the differences among them are blurred. A single phenomenon may be interpreted from myriad points of view. This renders his poems difficult, complex and obscure and having innumerable possibilities. Any particular, distinctive approach alone is insufficient to interpret the use of violence either in a specific poem or the whole gamut of Eliot’s poetry. The plurality of identity of personae is an innovative technical rendering of the poet. Regarding the above extract the first question arises, who is the persona here and whom does he speak to? The persona may be the poet himself addressing to his friend Ezra Pound who was fond of wearing ‘stetson’ hat. Or the speaker may be any individual experiencing the agony of war, of the past history as well as of the First World War. It may also be the buried racial memory evoked by the horror of the F.W.W or all these possibilities at once. The ambiguity and uncertainty always remain a pivotal position in Eliot. Fragmentation and disintegration of self and history intensify chaos and anarchy prevailed upon time—past and present. The sudden shifting of literary allusion to John Webster’s (1580-1625?) ‘The White Devil’ enacts the same continuity of violence throughout history. Line 4-5 of the extract refers the reader to the dirge sung by Cornelia for her son. She sings for ‘The friendless bodies of unburied men’. The familiar notion of dog being friend of men is contrasted with the menacing image of dog in the Old Testament. The psalmist pleads with the Lord to save him from the evil:

“For dogs have compassed me :The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me:
They pierced my hands and my feet…Deliver my soul from the sword ; My darling from the power of the dog.”56

The differences among the Biblical violence, depicted through the menacing image of dog, the literary reference to the dirge of Cornelia’s son in Webster’s The White Devil, the violence in the battle of Mylae, and the oblique reference to violence in the W.W-I

56Psalms xxii, the Bible.pp.16-20.
are merged and mixed up. Violence in all the events becomes different versions of same brutality, cruelty and ferocity committed by man against man.

Das presents the same violence-ridden time, war-infected history from past to the contemporary, although in a slightly different way from Eliot. His presentation of universal violence we find in the following lines:

`Piramid o atom agun adhir praranar
Uthsarita rastra, samaj saktir rachanai
Plan, commission, conferencer brihat prasade
Hathat mahasarisripke dekha yai`

[State and society with its lively zest of pyramid and atomic fire endeavour to build up power through planning, commission and conference. A huge serpent is seen suddenly in their great palatial conference hall.]

(‗Prithibi Aaj‘ [The World Today] )

Here optimistic Das speaks of the infernal cycle of time and the darkness of the century. The reference to the ‘pyramid’ and ‘atomic fire’ connects the past violent history of ancient time and the demonic act of dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. ‘Plan’, ‘commission’ and ‘conference’ refer to the futile political practice of the civilized nations underneath which prevails the savagery, cruelty and greed. The conference probably alludes to the conference hall of Versailles. The treaty of Versailles (1919) was imposed by the victor powers upon the losers, particularly upon Germany. The political motive was one of revenge against and repression of Germany. The peace settlement was in fact, a farce. As Hobsbawm rightly assesses:

“It is not necessary to go into the detail of inter-war history to see that the Versailles settlement could not possibly be the basis of a stable peace. It was doomed from the start, and another war was therefore practically certain.”

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The great ‘serpent’ may be the Great War-II, or the devilish deeds of treachery, conspiracy, retributive motive of the victor powers against the losers of the Great War. The ‘serpent’ may be allegorically interpreted as the Biblical serpent that tempted and deceived our first ancestors, and brought about the fall of Man from Heaven. So, Das’s imagination goes as far as Eliot’s, depicting the wounds and agonies inflicted upon time by the violent deeds of man, from time immemorial to contemporary history.

Eliot makes use of innumerable mythical, historical religious, socio-political and literary allusions and references which reinforce the dominant aspect of violence in his poetry. Eliot inclines to depict the cultural past of Europe through the allusions which themselves are full of conflicts, clashes and confrontations. Eliot himself acknowledges this when he says:

“It is an advantage to mankind in general to live in a beautiful world; that no one can doubt. But for the poet is it so important? We mean all sorts of things, I know by Beauty. But the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror and the glory.”

_The Hollow Men_ (1925) is the next great poem of Eliot which follows _The Waste Land_ (1922). The poem dramatizes the cultural fragmentation, religious crisis, spiritual emptiness and emotional sterility in post-war Europe. Here the violence is fomented by cultural fragmentation depicted through the allusion of _Heart of Darkness_, political conspiracy through the allusion of Guy Fawkes and spiritual emptiness through the allusion of Dante’s _Vita Nuova_. The text contains multifarious dimensions, all of which collectively heighten the arid spiritual state of the hollow men, their anguish and remorse. ‘The Hollow Men’ is a culminating point of Eliot’s poetic success. The poem dramatizes the mental state of guilt and remorse. It evokes a bleak and sinister world of spiritual doom and death. The poem moves through different levels of consciousness and every level reflects the baffling state of chaos and anarchy; of agony and helplessness; the baffling enigma of the existence. The

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epigraph to the section heading, ‘Mistah Kurtz- he dead’ is from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. The words are spoken by an African servant, when he reports Kurtz’s death. The epigraph cryptically unfolds the whole history of political violence and cultural confrontation in the African colonial countries. Kurtz is a colonial agent, an ivory trader. He has gone out to Congo with the spurious ideal of ‘white man’s burden’ to educate savage people. Ironically, Kurtz surrenders himself to the dark primordial impulses within his own psyche and taking part in ‘unspeakable rites’. The allusion, apart from indicating the void, hollowness and sterility, shows up how the white colonialists become God of the natives by hook or by crook, only to exploit and plunder their treasures. They play the thief in the guise of god. Their food, clothes, language, rituals, and habits of living have nothing to do with the natives. There is not a single cultural affinity between the African natives and the white Europeans. And the white people are always boastful of their culture and civilization. Yet the fact is that not Kurtz and his race and nation, but the natives can rightly be termed ‘civilized’. Formal education and progress in science and technology are not indicators of civilization. How can civilized people capture other’s land and property by force or fraud? How can they exploit and torture the natives living in their own home land? How can the ‘civilized’ people deprive the natives of their rights and liberty of which they very often speak of? Therefore, resistance is a way that the natives would ultimately undertake against their oppressors. This happens in the African and Asian countries throughout last two centuries. The liberation movement has inevitably brought about conflicts and violence. The idea of ‘violence as coercion vs. violence as liberation’ is justifiably explained by Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon comments:

“National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth; whatever may be the headings used or the formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.”

This is rightly so. Fanon continues further:

“Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies. Their first

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encounter is marked by violence and their existence together – that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and canon.”61

The epigraph, ‘A penny for the old guy’ to the poem ‘The Hollow Men’ alludes to the religious intolerance leading to the abortive political violence of the Gun powder plot (1605). Guy Fawkes was the principal conspirator along with others who designed to blow up the English parliament, but is caught finally, tried and executed. Eliot enlarges his voices and visions and associates Conrad’s Kurtz with Guy Fawkes of the Gunpowder plot, both of whom are likened to the staffed effigy, and the hollow men. The reference to Kurtz and Guy Fawkes heighten the atmosphere of darkness, horror and evil.

Another example of the violent act of massacre alluded to is the Biblical reference of Samson in the fourth part of ‘The Hollow Men’:

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms.

Samson is a renowned Biblical hero. He slew ‘a thousand philistines’ with ‘a new jawbone of an ass.’ He then threw away the jawbone and called the spot ‘Ramath-lehi’ – or ‘the height of lehi’- lehi is the Hebrew equivalent to jawbone. At the dying hour of life Samson’s thirst was quenched by water through a jawbone, after which his soul was revived. The significance of Samson’s spiritual regeneration is contrasted to the fate of the hollow men who remain perpetually in a death-in-life existence. But here too, Eliot’s orthodox attitude is reflected in his praise and glorification of Samson’s heroism. Samson may be great hero to his tribe, the Dan and to the orthodox Christian because he fought for his tribe and for the Christians. Here Eliot may be blamed of being a racist, the idea generalized by Jean Paul Sartre, “our well

61 Ibid., p. 28
meaning souls are racist.”

His celebration of the ‘heroic’ achievement of Samson reflects his biasness for Samson as he fought against the Philistines. So the charge of racism and anti–Semitism, leveled against Eliot get support from this reference. The Biblical Samson and the Miltonic Samson are simultaneously projected by Eliot, though the contexts are different. The action of war is justified and praised. Samson killed a thousand Philistines in the war. Elsewhere Eliot himself denounced war and violence in the name of heroism:

\[\text{\ldots Unnatural vices} \]
\[\text{Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues} \]
\[\text{Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.} \]
\[\text{\textquotedblleft Gerontion\textquoteright, ll-43-46} \]

Thus we find that Eliot’s stand remains ambivalent. The allusion to Samson proves this. Now Samson is contrasted to the hollow men, and is connected to Kurtz, who too, is a hollow sham, hollow at the core. Whatever may be Eliot’s stand regarding Samson, the tone and temper of the poem is heightened by violence that happened in past as well as happening at present.

Thematically and stylistically The Hollow Men is a unique creation. Undoubtedly, Jibanananda has no equivalent to the poem. But most of the later poems of Das deal with the political violence and cultural chaos that overtook the first half of the twentieth century. The ravaging effect of the World Wars on mankind and the oppressive British rule in India deeply disturbed his vision and imagination. From 1930s onward Das is more direct, less allusive. Of course, he uses unique symbols and images to achieve the required poetic effect. How much Das was influenced by the “popular-front” politics of late 30s can be well understood from a comment of Clinton. B. Seely. During late 30s, comments Seely:

\[\text{“Popular-front politics was exerting an influence on writers in South-Asia.} \]
\[\text{1936 saw the formation of the \textquoteleft All India Progressive Writer’s Association\textquoteright, a} \]
\[\text{direct outcome of the policies set at the world congress of the commintern a} \]
\[\text{year earlier. From the perspective of A.I.P.W.A, literature should possess, \textquoteright an} \]
\[\text{impulse towards social reconstruction, the power to reflect the hard realities of} \]

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life – in short we want a literature which may produce in us movement, change and restlessness. At the moment of its inception, Jibanananda was anything but committed to such a philosophy. From the late 1930s onward, we find in Jibanananda an increasing awareness of the political world around him, a world less and less comprehensible to him."

Since the publication of Dhusar Pandulipi in 1936 Das emerged as a leading avant-garde figure in Bengali poetry. This book is a significant one in the history of Bengali poetry. Not only Jibanananda emerged here as a mature poet with a distinct idiom of his own, but also someone utterly exotic to the main tradition of Bengali poetry. Side by side with the aesthetic presentation of the eternal beauty of nature, Das began to show an increasing tendency towards the chaotic and violence-ridden world. This we find in his superb symbolic poem ‘kampe’ or more distinctly and directly in ‘Bodh’ or ‘Prem’, although with a personal touch. But with the publication of Banalata Sen (1942), Das’s world widens far and beyond the single theme of love, betrayal and languishment. Of course, love remains a major force throughout his whole poetic career. Though there are differences in many respects, ‘Banalata Sen’, the title poem of the anthology by the same name, may take after ‘The Hollow Men’ in many respects also. The poem is built up through a series of lively images of seas and islands, birds and trees, lashing storm and quiet resting place, of nature and women, that merge the geography of mythical and geographical times only to culminate upon frustration, failure and hopelessness of modern man. In many ways Ashoka of ‘Banalata Sen’ may be compared to Samson of ‘The Hollow Men’. The poem goes thus:

Hajar bachhar dhare aami path hantitechhi prithibir pathe,
Sinhal samudra theke nishither andhakare Malaya sagare
Anek ghurechhi aami; Bimbisare Ashoker dhusar jagate
Sekhane chhilam ami, aro dur andhokare bidarbha nagare;
Ami klanto pran ek, charidike jiboner samudra saphen,
Amare dudando shanti diechhilo Natorer Banalata Sen.

[For aeons have I roamed the roads of the earth/ From the seas of Ceylon to the straits of Malaya/ I have journeyed, alone, in the enduring night, / And down the dark corridor of time I have walked / Through mist of Bimbisara, Asoka, darker Vidarbha. / Round my weary soul the angry waves still roar; / My only peace I knew with Banalata Sen of Natore.]

(‗Banalata Sen’, Banalata Sen)⁶⁴

The allusion evokes not the grandeur of historical past, but the horror and blood-bath of the battle of Kalinga fought between Ashoka and the King of Kalinga. Samson is celebrated as a tragic hero both in the Biblical text as well as in the literary text of Milton and others. Ashoka is also a regenerated hero who was so much shocked with the blood-bath of the battle of Kalinga that he was thereafter transformed into religious Ashoka, a preacher of peace, love, and brotherhood. The persona is tired, exhausted and broken-hearted. His world-weary soul roams through the contrived corridor of history, in search of love and solace. But ‘Banalata Sen’ of Natore is only a figment of imagination. Failure to obtain love leads to idealization of lady-love. This is another aspect of the loveless world from where the narrator willfully escapes into the world of dream and imagination. Does not this remind us Prufrock? Although the perspective is different, and the purpose of the persona as well as the mode of presentation is different, the romantic sojourn of Prufrock among the dream girls reminds of the narrator of ‘Banalata Sen’. The personae of both the poems express their agony and suffering at the plight and predicament of the situation. The world of brutality and cruelty is too much for them to bear. The narrator voyages through the passage of time and space and experiences the same blood-thirstiness and mindless brutality and killings of man for power and profit. In this respect there is least difference between the violence of past and that of present. Of course, there is a positive argument in this respect. Violence of resistance against the oppressors is always hailed by the humanists as a noble and glorious act of virtue. Whatever may be

the cause and nature of violence the bitter truth still remains, that violence exists as an inevitable reality with the existence of life.

The political violence of the world is versified further through a number of crude, cacophonous and harsh jargon, in the poem ‘Andhakar’ (Darkness):

Voi peyechhi,
Peyechhi asim durniubar bedona;
Dekhechhi raktim akashe surya yege othe
Manusik soinik seje prithibir mukhomukhi danabar janya

Amake nirdesh diyeche
Amar samasta hriday ghrinay-bedonay akroshe bhore giyechhe,
Suryer roudre akanta ei prithibe yeno koti koti shuorer
Artanade utsav shuru koreche.

[‘With fear and pain I saw/ The red sun ordering me to stand to attention,/ My face turned stiffly towards the world, / My heart filled with hatred/ For the world fermented in the heat of the sun, / Festive with the squaling of the pigs,/ Bursting with sordid joy.’]

(‘Andhakar’ [Darkness], Banalata Sen)

The world Das presents here is a dark and demonic one, lacking light and life. The narrator feels himself a caged animal and painfully expresses his hatred, agony, helplessness and nausea. During 40s the world had been turned into a pandemonium and the persona had no way and nowhere to escape. Darkness and chaos had descended upon earth as the World War – II broke out in 1939 and the whole Europe is turned into a killing field. The devastating effect of the W.W-II is summed up by Hobsbawn thus:

“…the global human catastrophe unleashed by the Second World War is almost certainly the largest in human history. Not the least tragic aspect of this

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catastrophe is that humanity has learned to live in a world in which killing, torture and mass exile have become everyday experiences which we no longer notice.”

The fear (voi), pain (bedona), crimson sky (raktim akash), soldier (soinik) - all these words heighten the situation where the narrator revolted against brutal, cruel and violent world of the catastrophic days of 40s.

In *Four Quartets* Eliot deconstructs both the approach to discourse as well as discourse itself. Coming to the last quarter of his career, Eliot seemed to have experienced the nihilistic vision of chaos and disintegration in all levels and layers of life and art. He does find neither any integrity, cohesiveness nor any possibility of a possible compromise or even compatible units of representations for such complete, coherent, integrated universe. What appears therefore, before a fragmented, desiccated, conflicting and ever-changing prismatic poetic matrix – is that the colourful shades and light that it radiates are elusive, impalpable, deceptive, ever-changing and ever-vanishing. What frantic search for specific, distinct, definite or complete, signify then? In *Four Quartets* the poet does not deliver any conscious pattern of thoughts or ideas. He simply states or records a few of unnumbered, indefinite, unspecified, contradictory possibilities of ever-shifting states, ideas, situations or even some factual events. All these present and non-present possibilities are presented through chaotic technique and form in the backdrop of a broader and deeper epical context of time, place and space.

The apparent integrity of arrangement of each section of *Four Quartets* is belied by its tendency to dissipate into unnumbered, indistinct, and contradictory indefinite ‘vertiginous possibilities’. A penetrating looking into the discourse brings about the ‘heart of life’ (?). Yet this disorder and chaos in many ways are translated versions of violence, chaos and disorder of temporal and spatial world. There are many touches of implied topical reference which in turn, render universal and range beyond time. Yet the effect of these heightened the atmosphere of anarchy, violence, disorder and chaos.

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Eliot’s reference to ‘darkness’ in *Four Quartets* is a widely discussed episode. In Jibanananda Das we find a natural counterpart of Eliot’s ‘darkness’ in *Four Quartets*. Eliot’s canvass is undoubtedly vaster than Das, yet both the poets endeavoured to present a bewildered universe, broken and shattered by two consecutive world wars. In *East Coker* Eliot philosophically utters:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters.
The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
Distinguished civil servants, chairman of many committees,
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,
And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha
And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the directory of directors,
And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.
And we all go with them into the silent funeral,
Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to bury.

(‘East Coker’ – III, *Four Quartets*)

The idea presented here is aptly illustrated in *The Times Literary Supplement*:

“There is grandeur in the humility of the English religious poets, but there is a lack of their ecstasy in ‘East Coker’. Where Vaughan, whose days were as troubled as our own and little less violent, saw eternity the other night and bright shoots of everlastingness, Mr. Eliot sees only the dark. ‘They all go into the dark’, all the people in his vision of a world of bankers, men of letters, statesmen, commiteemen, contractors, labourers, who eat and work and go to bed and get out of bed. All are for the dead, ‘And we all go with them, into the silent funeral! Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to bury’. This is a hymn of humility, but a sad one, and somewhat incongruous. For in spite of the animation of his powerful incantations there is more satire than poetry in Mr. Eliot’s head-shaking over a terrible, bleak, meaningless world of hollow men,
with smell of steaks in passage ways, and satire and humility go strangely
together. This is the confession of a lost heart and a lost art.”  67

The reference to ‘darkness’ dramatizes the spiritual crisis as well as the predicament
of the war-torn material world. That Eliot was deeply concerned with the bloody days
of the time is well understood from his own statement. In his editorial valedictory
‘Last Words’ in the final issue of the ‘Criterion’ Eliot wrote, “The period immediately
following the war of 1914 is often spoken of as a time of disillusionment: in some
ways and for some people it was rather a period of illusions”68. And in the concluding
paragraph of ‘The Idea of a Christian Society’ Eliot wrote:

“I believe that there must be many persons, who, like myself, were deeply
shaken by the events of 1938; persons to whom that month brought a
profonder realization of general plight….a feeling of humiliation which
seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and
amendment, a doubt of the validity of the civilization…”69

The reference also alludes to ‘darkness’ presented through Milton’s Samson and
thereby evokes the whole history of violence and war that had been inflicted upon
Samson and his people. Samson’s vision of darkness imagined by Milton follows
thus:

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse,
Without all hope of day.

(Samson Agonistes)

The ‘darkness’ in Eliot implies the darkness persisting in different versions of time,
place and people in the gyre of history. The darkness definitely implies the darkness

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created out of chaos of the World Wars as well as the spiritual darkness that blinds the soul of man. In ‘Andhakar’ Das also depicts the same state of chaos in physical reality as well as psychological- spiritual state of mas as shown in the above discussed fragment of Eliot.

Cultural chaos and disintegration are projected through numerous symbols, images and mythical allusions in the poetry of both Eliot and Das. Both the poets tend to translate the distorted, thwarted, and suspended spiritual state as well as the decayed, barren and broken material state through those images, symbols and allusions. One such mythical allusion used by Eliot is ‘Sibyl’. Eliot borrowed the image from Greek and Roman literature and myth. The allusion is strong and multifarious in nature. It connotes innumerable ideas and events, suggesting the failure of a diseased and decayed civilization. The allusion heightened the suspended state of spiritual emptiness and the theme of death-in-life. Moreover, the sense of bondage and imprisonment and the frantic desire for release from the prison house of the persona’s ego or consciousness, is focused. The image of Sibyl reminds Michelangelo’s fierce Cumaen Sibyl- mannish with aged female breast- on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in Rome. The image indicates parallel version of disorder and chaos that had been in the legendary past as well exists in contemporary period also. That the post-war Europe was passing through chaos and darkness, gloom and terror, was a veritable truth. The myth of ‘Sibyl’ is drawn directly from “Satyricon”, a satire by the first century Roman poet Petronius and is used as epigraph in The Waste Land. The myth, apart from the above aspects, widens the range of the significance by its ambiguity and its relativity to the context.

Das too, very often spoke of the ugly hags to give vent to his sense of anger, fear, disgust and nausea, generated by failure and helplessness in life as well as the ugliness and cruelty of the material world. Das’s equivalent to Eliot’s ‘Sibyl’ is ‘Daini’ (hag or witch). Although like Sibyl it does not evoke the vaster mythical and literary world of allusions, Das’s Daini evokes a strong sense of disgust and hatred for the contemporary world of chaos and violence. From Jhara Palak (1927) onward, Das is deeply concerned with the socio-political violence and cultural disintegration. He presents visible, concrete, chaotic pictures of blood and dirt; hunger and riot; torture and exploitation. Eliot records the impalpable, abstract, omnipresent state of agony, fear, emptiness and waste. He is concerned with the crisis of soul; at the same time
optimistic and dubious of different metaphysical questions. Yet he struggles to move forward in quest of perfection and falls into dissipation, like the damned protagonist of Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Therefore Eliot’s task is more difficult than Das. Das translates into his poetry the awful, bloody picture of man and his society, Eliot translates the state of being. Das presents the world of chaos openly and directly in one of his early poems ‘Kishorer Prati’:

...Dariar teer chhari dei nai dabo marubhumi

Jalanta nishthur!

Nagarir khudra bokshe jage yei mrityu pretpur

Dakinir ruksho attohasi!

[…The burning, cruel desert does not desert the river. Death’s ghostly kingdom and the harsh, loud laughter remain awake in the little breast of the city.]

(‘Kishorer Proti’ [‘To Adolescent Boy] Jhara Palok [Fallen Feathers])

The picture parallels the dirt, squalor, filth and barrenness of the material world of Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock’. Das’s ‘dakini’ is the proto-type of Eliot’s ‘Sibyl’. Das’s ‘daini’ as presented in ‘Monobeej’ (*Mahaprithibi*) or ‘Itihaasjan’ (*Bela Abela Kalbela*) is the embodiment of evil, darkness and destruction. Similarly, Eliot’s Sibyl, Tiresias or Madame Sosostris represent the punishment of death-in-life existence. The fate of the ‘backward devil’ in ‘Gerontion’ is worth mentioning here. All the references indicate a world of topsy-turvy Dom, and anarchy. Jibanananda was profoundly influenced by Eliot’s innovative technique and his concern for the breakdown of a civilization of two thousand years. *The Waste Land* dramatizes this cultural and spiritual breakdown. Das seems to have copied Eliot’s idea and images from *The Waste Land* in his very short poem ‘Mather Galpo’

Metho chand royechhe takaye

Amar mukher dike daine ar banye

Podo jami – khar-nara – mather fatal

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Shishirer jal!

[The moon of the fallow field stare at me, left and right. The waste land, straw field, cracked dry land holds dewdrops.]

(‘The Moon atop the Field’, Banalata Sen)\(^\text{71}\)

The lines echo the ‘water – dripping song’ of twenty nine lines from Eliot’s ‘What the Thunder Said’:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which the mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one can not stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that can not spit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water and no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock

If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water.

(The Waste Land)

Das seems to have been deeply influenced by the 19th century French poets, particularly Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Eliot was a great admirer of both poets, although Laforgue was his most favorite. He praised Baudelaire for his evocation of evil and the depiction of the dirty and seamy aspects of the sordid metropolis. In his controversial poem ‘Ratri’ Das nakedly presents the filth, dirt and squalor of the modern metropolitan civilization in the following lines:

Highdrant khule diye kushtha rogi chete nei jal;
Athaba se highdrant hoyto ba giyechhilo feshe.
Ekhon dupur rat daal bendhe nagarite naame
Ekti motor car gadaler mato galo keshe

Aashthir petrol jhede – satoto satarko theke tabu
Keu yeno bhayabaha bhabo pode gachhe jale.

[Turning the hydrant on the leper licks up water/ - Or perhaps it was always on any way, Midnight descends in hordes upon the city. A motor car rushes past, coughing like a moron, restlessly sprinkling petrol.]

(‘Ratri’ [The Night] Saat Ti Taarar Timir [Darkness of the Seven Stars])

Dry, arid, dirty physical world is presented in Eliot’s poems as a natural counterpart to the spiritual and emotional state of man. This we find abundantly in almost all his major poems, starting from ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ to ‘Four Quartets’.

As a crude phenomenon of violence ‘war’ plays a pervasive role in the poetry of both Eliot and Das. Das’s later poetry, from Banalata Sen onward, vividly represents the war-torn violence-ridden world. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed two consecutive World Wars and both the wars were total war. That the whole of the globe was in the war, either intentionally or forcefully, was a veritable truth and all the nations were told upon directly or indirectly by the destruction and ravages of the wars. And the destruction was so havoc and far-reaching that no individual could imagine to escape the flame and burn created by the bullets and bombs of the two Great Wars. The Wars not only killed millions of human beings but destroyed human property so extensively and awfully that human beings ceased to imagine what they have witnessed and experienced. It destroyed the very foundation of global economy which had a far-reaching impact on the nation state and the African and Asian colonies. Apart from the material loss and the loss of human lives, the wars destroyed the morale of civilized culture and its long-cherished values.

Both Eliot and Das witnessed both the Great Wars. In fact, the great poems of Eliot cover the whole period of the two wars. Das’s later poems were tuned up with the sound of guns, planes, mortars and bombs. Most of his later poems present the bare, naked pictures of World Wars and the moral and spiritual chaos it created. Poverty, famine, riot, clashes with the colonialist force were recurrent phenomena in Das. Many critics accused Eliot as opportunist who consciously avoided the troubles of war and remained silent and aloof from its turmoil. Carole Seymour Jones comments, “the war interested him little”73. She further tries to justify her opinion by saying that “As a citizen of a neutral country, Eliot was able to benefit from the war…By showing as few signs of life as possible, he did not alarm people…”74. This accusation of Jones is wholly untenable and prejudicial. This is based neither upon


evidence nor any logical argumentation. That Eliot was seriously concerned with the war and its demonic effect on human civilization is exemplified from the very first anthology of his, Prufrock and Other Observations (1917). He dedicated the volume to his friend and fellow lodger, Jean Verdenal, a medical student with acute interest in art and literature, during his study in Paris in 1910-11. Verdenal became an army medical officer in November 1914 and was killed in the Dardanelles, Turkey on 2nd May, 1915. Eliot recalled their friendship in the April issue, 1934, of Criterion:

“I am willing to admit that my own retrospect is touched by a sentimental sunset, the memory of a friend coming across the Luxemberg gardens in the late afternoon, waving a branch of lilac, a friend who was later (so far as I could find out) to be mixed with the mud of Gallipoli.”

The death of Verdenal was so shocking to Eliot that reminiscences of him recur throughout the whole of his poetic career. The dedication to Verdenal directly links the reader to the First World War. But Eliot’s poetic practice is very different from others. To maintain objectivity and distance he consciously avoided topical reference to war. But this does not mean that he was indifferent to war and its scars. On the contrary, we can say that Eliot was so acutely conscious of its destructive force and his soul was so heavily charged with the shocking agony of war, he deliberately avoided its visual representations and endeavours to explore the epicentre of the inferno, its fire and flame within which the soul is bound to burn permanently and without any respite and hope of redemption. To depict the suspended state of soul, Eliot takes recourse to rhetoric and other innovative poetic techniques. Abstract gets concrete and time, place and space are set against one unfathomable powerful soul - ever suffered, ever burnt within the prison of either the ego of one’s own self or lies painfully naked upon the vast waste land. Eliot provides priority to the unspeakable, suspended state of soul and its agony, pain, nausea and hopelessness. These are the havoc human ruins of the Great Wars. In short Eliot illustrates the after-shock; the quake remains behind, as a mere event.

War and violence in Eliot is always shown as a universal phenomenon. In this respect, Eliot sees violence of the past as well as of the contemporary as one single

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version of futility, anarchy and failure. The distinction between time past and time present is blurred. The violent episode Eliot refers to from history, myth and legend is inseparably linked to the violence and war of the 20th century. So Eliot’s concern is vaster and greater than the simple narration of the crude events of war and violence. To his magical imaginative vision and intuitive understanding of the inner state of existence war and violence is integrally associated in the epical spectrum of futility, anarchy and helplessness of human civilization. The apocalyptic vision of ‘crucifixion’ scene (T.W.L), London bridge (T.W.L) and the ‘falling towers’ (Four Quartets), etc. render his poetic statement a cosmic one. The archetypal pattern of violence and wars, from time immemorial to the contemporary era, gives his poems profundity, complexity, variety and a unique status in the whole gamut of English poetry, hitherto composed.

In his depiction of war and violence Das is less symbolic, more direct. Yet the symbols and images he uses are as unique as Eliot’s. Das was virtually obsessed with the Great Wars and its terrible effect. In many of his later poems the romantic, visionary, colourful world of beauty are vanished and the stern realities of hunger, poverty, riots famine and war of the 40s are graphically presented. Eliot’s image of ‘lilac’ is reminiscent of Jean Verdenal which haunts his vision throughout his whole poetic career. It recurs in almost each volume of his great anthologies. Verdenal was a victim of the First World War. So the image reminds the war again and again. War-time imagery is embedded in ‘Gerontion’ and ‘The Waste Land’. Gerontion speaks of his failure to participate in the heroic war and its glorious achievements:

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass
Bitten by flies fought.

(‘Gerontion’, Poems-1920)

Does Eliot share his thought with Gerontion? The question remains unresolved, for Eliot’s view remains paradoxical, contradictory and even baffling, in this regard. Whatever may be Eliot’s subjective opinion, the fact remains that the citation refers to the battle fought between the Spartans and the Persians in 480B.C. There is perhaps an oblique autobiographical reference to Eliot’s unsuccessful effort to join the army
during the First World War. On the contrary, Das’s attitude to war is very clear. He is a pacifist and never glorifies war. In this regard, there is neither any contradiction nor any ambivalence. He always condemns and criticizes the meaningless massacres of war and violence. His attitude to war is well expressed in ‘Suchetana’, ‘Charidike Prakitir’, ‘Uttarsamariki’, ‘Itihas jan’, ‘Samayer Teere’, ‘Ei Sab Dinratri’, ‘Bhor O Chhayti Bomar’, ‘Akashe Raat’, Prithivi Aaj’, and many other poems directly related to the Great Wars. Of course, Eliot contradicts Gerontion’s earlier view and made a trenchant attack against the so-called heroism, courage and bravery in war:

Think

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

(‘Gerontion’)

This view and outlook of Eliot perfectly matches with Das who too, expresses his disgust and anger at the meaningless massacre of war and violence in the name of patriotism and heroism in many of his poems like ‘Akashe Raat’, ‘Itihas jan’, ‘Uttarsamariki’, etc. An extract from ‘Itihaas Jaan’ may be cited which echoes the voice of ‘Gerontion’ cited above:

Amader probinera amader achchhannata diye gechhe?
Amader monishira amader ardhasatya bole gechhe
Ardhomithyar?.........................................................

Gyan bodo dur prithibir
Ruksha galpe; amader janye dur – durotoro aaj.
Samoyer bapti ye gayan ane amader prane
Ta to nei; - sthabirotachhe jara achhe.
Charidik theke ghore keboli bichitra bhoy klanti abosad
Roye gechhe.

[Have our old ancestors left drowsiness for us? Our wise men have told half-truth of half-lie? …Knowledge remains at a far distance in the stark reality of our earth.

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Time which brings knowledge to us does not exist. Only disease and idleness continue to persist. All around us remains only fear, exhaustion and nausea.

(‘Itihas jaan’ [Historic Carriage] Bela Abela Kaalbela [Time Wrong Time Inauspicious Time])

In The Waste Land there are many implied suggestions which remotely link to the First World War. Thus we find the ‘corpse’ that won’t be buried; ‘Lil’s demobbed husband’; ‘rat’s alley’ and the ‘ship of Mylæ’. It is interesting to note that for nearly seven decades critics have least bothered to identify the war subtext. Eliot’s credit lies in giving verbal equivalence to the emptiness, sterility and anarchy of Europe during and after the Great Wars. The war experience becomes living and lively because he has subsumed the experience into a deeper sense of life’s horror, of which the war is one symptom.

Again, one may easily be tempted to relate the returning dead of ‘On Leave’ to the dead crossing the London Bridge in The Waste Land. This may be clue to war, but without specific link to the First World War or any war in particular. This enhances the scope of the images to release beyond the boundary of time, from particular to general, from general to universal. The picture of the western front is imprinted in Eliot’s images which Hobsbawm presents so vividly:

“This is the western front which became a machine for massacre such as had probably never before been seen in the history of warfare. Millions of men faced each other across the sand bagged parapets of the trenches under which they lived like and with, rats and lice.”

In Das’s poetry images of war and statements of personae are very often directly linked to the First and Second World War. We find direct reference to Hitler, the chief architect of the World War-II, and another character Quisling, integrally related to the War in Das’s ‘Sristir Teere’:


Yuge yuge manuser adhayabasay
Aparer sujoger mato mane hoy.
Quisling banalo ki nijo nam- Hitler saat kanakadi
Diye taha kine niye hoye galo laal;
Manuser hate tabu manus hatechhe najehal;
Prithibite nei kono bishuddha chakri.
E kemon paribeshe roye gechhi sabe…

[Human endeavour becomes other’s opportunity throughout ages. Quisling makes his own reputation which Hitler hijacks for his own promotion. Man is being heckled by man yet and there’s no pure job on earth. In what environment do we remain all…]

(‘Srishtir Teere’ [On the bank of Creation] Saat Ti Tarar Timir [Darkness of the Seven Stars])

The poet’s helplessness and frustrations are expressed with utmost sincerity and acute heart-ache. The apocalyptic vision of a dark shadow, a prelude to destruction, covers the sky of the continent of Europe, Asia and Africa is illustrated in ‘Ratrir Chorus’:

Paschime preter maton Europe;
Pub dike pretaito Asiar matha;
Africar debatatma jantur maton ghanaghatachhannata,
Yankir lenden dalare pratyoy

[In the west lies Europe like witch, towards east, the ghostly head of Asia. The holy soul of Africa is like animal’s possessiveness and the yanke relies much on transaction in dollar.]

(‘Night’s Chorus’, Saat Ti Tarar Timir) [Darkness of the Seven Stars]

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The image of ‘rat’ evokes the picture of waste, dirt and destruction of the battle-field and its diseased after-effect which eats up the health of life and civilization. *The Waste Land* of 1922 is superimposed on Das’s ‘Niriha, Klanta O Marmannanesider Gaan’:

Unish tirish theke unish challish saal tabu valo chhilo;  
Aaj ekchlishe poush mashe keman asadh yeno.  
Masa mere dhan vene, indur tadie  
Mahajander kachhe rin kheye rin bhule giye,  
Haturer kachhe giye sisirer mato sada shishi…

[‘1940 was better yet than 1930. Today’s December (poush) of 41 appears as if tasteless. Killing mosquitoes, preparing rice from paddy, driving rats, forgetting debtor’s debt and going to the quack doctor with white bottle like dews….’]

(‘Songs of the Innocent, Tired and Questers of Soul’)

Of course, Jibanananda’s presentation of the material world upholds the complete picture of socio-political state of contemporary Bengal of early 1940s. Interestingly, Hobsbawm’s account of the battle field upholds the same picture of the battle field as depicted by Eliot and Das.

At the last phase of his poetic career, particularly *Four Quartets* Eliot’s vision, imagination, intuition and understanding of the universe seem to be lost in a chaotic vortex of huge dark force. Eliot starts composing the pieces of *Four Quartets* under the shadow of the atomic war that starts in 1939. He continues to compose it during the final period of the War. Eliot’s poetic universe at this stage, both material representation and craftsmanship, remind us of the famous statement of W.B.Yeats: ‘Things fall apart, centre can not hold. /Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.’ (The Second Coming ). That the war shakes the very basis of life and culture is projected through the baffling images and paradoxical statements of Eliot. In *Four Quartets* Eliot seems to loose control and command over his thoughts and crafts as the world

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he experienced baffled him utterly. So the War and its menacing effect interfere in his poetic creativity and craftsmanship again and again. To give proper dimension, wartime perspectives are prosaically and nakedly presented:

- Garlic and sapphires in the mud
- Clot the bedded exle-tree.
- The trilling wire in the mud.
- Sings below inveterate scars
- Appeasing long forgotten wars.

\textit{(Burnt Norton -II)}

The cacophonic jargon embodies the crude phenomenon of war-time Europe. Eliot could not help visualizing what happens around him. So is Das. The same crude material world of dirt, mud, smoke and blood is presented by Das in his ‘Ratri’ (The Night) as discussed earlier.

The same disgust and nausea for war is prosaically expressed in ‘Sristir Teere’. Sumita Chakroborty defines the trend of poetry during this critical phase of 40s:

“No turning point of literary creativity can be identified by a single year. Yet after all, the newer tone of post-thirty Bengali poetry is heard from 1940-41. The fountain-source of the poetry of this new phase is that of a selfish, ominous and a murderous event like the World War which had really happened second time by defying all the concept, speech and preaching of the love for humanity.”\textsuperscript{81}

Similarly, \textit{Four Quartets} is steeped in war imagery. Though Eliot’s most poetic statements bear multifarious connotations, ‘time present’ and ‘time past’ are super imposed through various symbols and images: ‘Time and bell have buried the day./ The black cloud carries the sun away.’(‘Burnt Norton’, IV). The image of ‘black cloud’ abducting the sun and enveloping the sky immediately evokes the awful picture of darkness and chaos that descend upon earth with the outbreak of the World War-II. The same picture is projected by Das’s statements in ‘Raatrir Chorus’. The

image of darkness, evil and destruction embodies the war-time Europe and World. The darkness also reminds one the darkness of black out that that overtook cities during air-attack. Of course, the darkness bears diverse connotations- cultural chaos, spiritual aridity and emptiness and darkness that overtook the world due to large-scale devastation in the Great War. All these aspects are inter-related phenomena. All objects, things or elements of the material world are subject to change, decay and degeneration. Man’s culture and the material world he inhabits are subjected to the same law as it is pointed out by Christopher Dawson:

“He consequently, his culture is not an abstract intellectual construction, but a material organization of life, which is submitted to the same laws of growth and decay, of ‘generation and corruption’ as the rest of the material world”82

This philosophical view of life is tagged with temporal perspectives, or the gravity and seriousness of the temporal events may incite the poet’s vision to view life on a vaster canvass of philosophical truth. These and multifarious other issues are simultaneously represented through:

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.

(‘East Coker’ – I, *Four Quartets*)

The citation clearly invites to associate us with some specific features of the literary past. As it is well-known that Eliot’s allusive technique embraces ‘time past’ with all its paraphernalia *Coker* achieves its significance historically. Coker is a small village near Yeovil on the border of Dorsetshire and Somersetshire in England, reputedly the birth place of Sir Thomas Elyot (?-1546), the author of *The Book Named The Gouvernour* (1531). After reading the quoted lines, we are at once struck by the link between Sir Thomas Elyot’s interest and T.S.Eliot’s famous declaration of faith as a

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“Classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-catholic in religion”\textsuperscript{83} which appeared in his preface to \textit{For Lancelot Andrews: essays on order and style}. Twentieth century Eliot probably saw an affinity with the Tudor Elyot, communing with himself in the dark spring following the outbreak of the Second World War, within little more than two decades. Sir Thomas Elyot was an ardent monarchist, a scholar deeply influenced by the writing of such continental humanists as Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus, and a thorough churchman. Eliot’s drawing parallelism with Sir Thomas Elyot is ironical and at the same time, a bit serious.

Again, the famous utterance, ‘In my beginning is my end’ is used in the poem as a refrain. It bears multifarious connotation. Maurice Baring wrote about the inscription in 1931 in his historical study of the Scottish Queen under this title. The title of this book needs interpretation in the study of violence in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. The inscription ‘In my End is my Beginning’ was embroidered upon the chair of the State of Mary, the Queen of Scots. The inscription is symbolic and steeped in various suggestions and meanings. Practically and politically, the end of Queen of Scots was her beginning; for at her death her son James Stuart, became heir to the crown of both Scotland and England. In its spiritual interpretation the ‘beginning’ is seen as “that highest type of knowledge- the intuition of pure being” which Christopher Dawson thinks as “the starting point of human progress” and man’s ultimate aim of attaining the knowledge of Divine Order, or God. The material interpretation stresses on the cyclic nature of history, the ‘gyre’, the temporality of the material achievement, and the mortality of man.

The historical perspective and philosophical vision of life and culture echo the spirit of \textit{The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire}. The vision of the ‘houses’ rising and falling, finds a natural counterpart in Das’s ‘Prithiviloke’. Houses- whether the term be taken literally to signify buildings, the material components of a village such as Coker, or figuratively, as dynasties- houses live and die, the same disintegration and menace of universal history continues:

\begin{itemize}
  \item there is a time for building
  \item And a time for living and for generation
\end{itemize}

And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto.

(East Coker, *Four Quartets*)

Interestingly enough, Eliot’s words echo the famous utterances in the Bible: Ecclesiastes III, one to eight lines:

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; … a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”

The war image is more crudely presented in part- IV of *East Coker*: ‘The wounded surgeon piles the steel/ That questions the distempered part.’ One of the most shocking war-images in *Four Quartets* is probably the image of the dove descending, breaking through the fiery air:

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongue declares

(‘Little Gidding’- IV, *Four Quartets*)

The terrible image of dove, descending through the fiery air, clearly reflects how war and violence of the 40s had shattered peace and serenity and brought about the possibility of complete extinction of race. Although there is no specific link to the World War-II, the image evokes the infernal atomic fire of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Being in fire and a part of it, Eliot could not avoid its heat and flame. This leads to the question of his aesthetic integrity. But the fact remains that Eliot never translates any specific contemporary event into his poetry, though he endeavours to create atmosphere and situation through rhetoric and language which could uphold the

84 The *Bible*, Ecclesiastes, III. ll. 1-8.
violence-ridden material world as well as the agony and chaos of the psychological and spiritual state of man.

**Patriarchal violence**

Both Eliot and Das bear the legacy of patriarchal domination which renders women as merely ‘Other’, in comparison to the dominant subject, ‘man’, who is assumed to represent humanity at large. In the writings of both, there remains little space for social, economic, cultural and political freedom of women. In Eliot’s poetry women are very often presented in a bitter and cynical manner and depicted as fickle, faithless, fleshly, meretricious creatures, having no capability of higher thinking and creativity. Women in Eliot are very often presented as merely sexual object. In a covert way he seems to support the mechanism which helps to establish and perpetuate male domination and female subordination. His depiction of women seems to establish the fact that he is following the foot-step of those patriarchal writers, from ancient to the recent time, whose works focus on the male protagonists and embody masculine traits and feelings and pursue masculine interest in masculine fields of action. The books like the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othelo, Tom Jones and Huckleberry Finn persistently uphold male domination and female deprivation. Eliot not only plays the role of torch-bearer in this respect, his tirade against women sometimes labeled him as a ‘misogynist’. Das’s attitude, on the contrary, is an ambivalent one. He sometimes adores and idealizes women and sometimes condemns and criticizes them. In the Jhara Palok phase Das’s poetry seems to depict man-woman relationship of love in the light of lust and carnality. Ambuj Basu made a pertinent statement in this respect:

“In the initial phase of Jibananda’s poetic composition, during the Jhara Palok phase the excitement of lustful love was noted. It was the ‘Kollol’ era. During those turbulent youthful days he had affinity with the ‘Kollol’ group of poets in portraying lustful physical desire.”

Let us take one example:

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Immediate after entering into the world of *Dhusor Pandulipi* Das seems to start dissociating him from the tradition of ‘*kollol*’ group of poets. Instead of presenting love as merely a physical pleasure of sex and women as a sexual object, Das began to develop lady worship. Here we find abundant affinity between Das and Yeats. Both the poets endeavoured to find an abode of peace, pleasure and serenity in woman. In his imagination and intuition women become an integral part of that blessed nature where God manifests himself through their nobility of heart, beauty of mind, virtues of soul and pure intellect. But Eliot throughout is a cynic and a misogynist. His savage tirade against women can not be justified by any argument, whatever may be the reasons. His gender biasness is well illustrated by Laurie. J. MacDiarmid:

“Eliot’s fall from political grace is ascribed primarily to his racist and sexist fantasies and his (improperly) private life. Our equally unseemly interest in Eliot’s sins expresses itself in the repeated exposure of our speculation about his somewhat flamboyant sexual and religious masquerades – his hasty

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marriage, recognition of his own sexual neurosis in the diagnosis and rejection of his wife, his clandestine conversion, his monk-like habits, and his obsessive moral self-abuse or flagellation. In a turn-of-the-century age characterized by pervasive skepticism, Eliot’s intellectual (and yet eroticized) Christian mysticism strikes us as an important attempt to escape his own domestic horrors and pervasive sexuality.\textsuperscript{87}

MacDiarmid’s statement is no exaggeration, for Eliot’s poetry is steeped in crude misogynic, inflammatory expressions. He leaves no stone unturned to ridicule and make fun of the fair sex in many of his great poems. Mythical, historical and literary references of violence against women are successively presented not with the motive of unfolding the naked truth of how women have been victimized in male-dominated civilization throughout centuries, but to establish and further consolidate his phallic prejudice. Violence against women gets new dimension in Eliot’s poem as he uses diverse rhetorical means to sharpen his tirade with the help of his huge historical knowledge and sharp intellect. Eliot’s misogynic female-hater temperament is born out of the orthodox puritan sexual morality, a familial legacy; his failed marital life; his monk-like temperament of self-sacrifice and self-surrender for the sake of attaining perfection in poetic inspiration or his search for a divine goal through poetic aestheticism; the masochistic pleasure of self-abuse and self-condemnation, a primitive religious cult and the poet’s fear of erotic relationship with any woman; his castration of the self – a surrender or sacrifice to realize the divinity transforming him into a John the Baptist, an Adonis, a Jesus, a Virgin Mary or a Buddha? Eliot’s conception of poet as cultural savior and the poetic creation a process of an austere, immaculate, self-surrender, an artistic incarnation which ultimately transcends to a Divine – needs to be analyzed carefully and meticulously. The conception is well developed in his germinal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” where Eliot repeatedly speaks of the need of self-sacrifice:

“The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality…that the poet has, not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular

\textsuperscript{87} MacDiarmid, Laurie. J. \textit{T. S. Eliot’s Civilized Savage: Religious Eroticism and Poetics}. London: Routledge, 2003, p. XVIII.
medium, which is only a medium and not a personality in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.”

The analogy between artistic self and divine self is merged and the difference between them is blurred. This artistic view of Eliot is mixed up with his psycho-neurotic eccentric behavior and religious taboos. Moreover, the poet’s continuous ill-health tells upon to develop this vision of life. Eliot’s psycho-sexual neurosis led him to recoil from developing any healthy physical relationship with Vivien. Or it may be that he was an impotent and his failure finds outlet in attacking women in various ways. His reference to Tiresias and his bi-sexuality indicates at this important aspect of his poetic pronouncement. Whatever may be the reasons the phenomenon of violence against women is vivid and forceful in his poetry. His antipathy against women tends to develop and display its force and ferocity from his very first anthology Prufrock and Other Observations (1917). The refrain he used in ‘The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock’ aptly shows his misogynic attitude. Prufrock’s mental journey turns up to a fashionable saloon where he visualizes: ‘In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo.’ The couplet’s underlying meanings are extremely derogatory and insulting to the women in general. The persona seems to suggest that the women who gather in the salon are merely pleasure seeking creatures, having no artistic taste, aesthetic sense and cultural value. They ‘come and go’ with an altogether different purpose. Their overt gesture, flamboyancy, and casual, matter of fact discussion of the great artist and his god-like creation show the ladies’ shallow nature. Their ‘talking of Michelangelo’ is a mockery of the great sculptor, painter and poet who loved God and man alike and transmuted his personal agony in his art. Eliot lashes upon the ladies more scathingly while he refers to the mythological episode of Salome and John the Baptist-

There will be a time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate.

(‘The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock’)

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The persona’s dilemma is undoubtedly the focal point. It shows how Prufrock is torn between attraction and repulsion, how he is trapped by sensual provocation and how he fails to retrace back. The mock-heroic comparison between him and John the Baptist, through the presentation of grand and trivial, serious and common-place is witty and well-planned and Eliot achieves unprecedented poetic success to create a situation and atmosphere that he wanted. But all is achieved at the cost of the women. The allusion immediately unfolds the story of Salome’s frivolous and sensual nature, her insensitivity and cruelty; her lack of human feelings and respect for idealism. John the Baptist refused Salome’s offer of love and therefore, he was decapitated by King Herod and his head was brought to Salome on a plate, the reward she wanted for dancing before the King. Here Eliot makes an implied comparison between Salome and modern ladies in a pub and his purpose is to depict the ladies of the saloon as frivolous, fickle and fleshly creatures living on animal plane. They are shorn of human values, culture and idealism. This sexual assault is shrewdly made and the poem achieves more than the expected success. Das’s attitude to love and ladies is an ambivalent one. Like Eliot he does not always use women as sexual object and exploit them to achieve his poetic success. Yet in many of his early poems in the *Jhara Palok* phase women have been attacked mercilessly. In his ‘Patita’ Das makes a ruthless attack against the harlot women. His cynicism, bitterness and anger are violently expressed in the poem-

Agar tahar bibhisika bhara, - jiban maronmoy!
Samajer buke avishap se ye,- se ye byadhi , -se ye khoy;
Premer pasra bhenge phele diye chhalanar karagar
Rachiachhe se ye,-diner aloy ruddha korechhe dar!
Suryakiran chakite nivaye sajiachhe nishachar,
Kalnaginir phanar maton nache se buker par!
Chaksho tahar kalkut jhare,-bishpankil shas,
Sarata jiban marichika tar, -prahasan pariahs!
Chhoante tahar mlan hoye yai sashitarakar shikha
Aloker pare neme ase tar andharer yabanika!
Se ye manwantar, - mrityur dut, - apaghat, - mahamari,-
Manus tabu se, - tar cheye bodo, se ye nari, se ye nari!
[Her room is horrible, her life is deadly. She is the curse of society; its decay and disease. She closes her door at dawn and indulges in deception. Putting out sunlight she dresses herself a nocturnal and dances upon the chest like a hooded serpent. Venom drops down from her eyes and her breath is poisonous and dirty. All her life is a mirage and she is an emblem of farce and ridicule. Her dark veil descends and blackens the light of the moon and the stars. She is famine, - messenger of death, paralysis and epidemic. Yet she is human being and above all, she is woman.]

(‘The Prostitute’, *Jhara Palok [Fallen Feathers]*)

Socio-cultural ambience of Das provides him neither salon nor restaurant and the frivolous bar girls. But ‘The muttering retreats/ Of restless nights in one night cheap hotel’ (‘Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock’) explicitly expresses the same fleshly pleasures of modern man. Das’s ‘prostitutes’ and Eliot’s cheap hotel-girls are of the same character, category and profession. In both the poems women have been presented as soft, sexual target of attack by male. Both the poets ridicule, abhor and attack women in loathsome language without justification. Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish refer to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber’s *No Man’s Land, The War of Words* and comments, “Early in-depth studies of Eliot focused almost exclusively on his patriarchal images of woman, violence against women and aversion to the female body.”

Das’s ambivalent attitude to women is well illustrated by juxtaposing his own composition as it is finely depicted by Mallika Sengupta. She sets a number of poems as proof of Das’s love and respect for women. Like Yeats Das’s lady-worship is a romantic and idealized phenomenon. She comments, “It is surprising to think that this Jibanananda describes women in a newer language of cruelty in other time. Even he holds few women responsible for ‘Yuddha aar banijjer beloiri roudra’.”

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Seikhane yuthachari kayekti nari
Ghanistha chander niche chokh aar chuler sankete
Medhabini; desh aar bidesher purushera
Yuddha aar banujjer rakte aar uthibena mete

Yuddha aar banijjer beloari roudrer din
Shes hoye gechhe sab;

[Over there a group of woman seems intelligent in their eye and hair under the adjacent moon. The men of the world will not be mad again with the blood of war and business. The sun-burnt day of war and business has come to an end.]

(‗Godhuli Sandhir Nritya’ [The Dance of Twilight-meet] , Saat Ti Tarar Timir [Darkness of the Seven Stars])

A perfect similarity is to be found between the prostitute women of Das’s ‘Patita’, ‘Godhuli Sandhir Nritya’ and the harlot woman of Eliot’s ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night.’ Das’s ‘chokh aar chuler sankete/ medhabini’ seems to be copied from Eliot’s ‘the corner of her eye / Twists like a crooked pin’. Eliot exploits women to present the desolation, dirt, dreariness and sin of the modern cosmopolitan civilization. Eliot presents the prostitute thus:

The street-lamp said, ‘Regard that woman
Who hesitates towards you in the light of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin.

(‗Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, Prufrock and Other Observations)

Eliot’s crude, nasty attack on women has no logical ground to defend. His tirade is not founded on reason. His presentation of women as irrational, insensitive, fleshly creatures, prone ever to devour its sexual prey, has no parallel in English literary history. In ‘Burbank with Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ Eliot directs his violent attack against women. Princess Volupine is presented with vicious, infidel and frivolous traits. Eliot attaches vices of sensuality, corruption of flesh, infidelity in love, greed for money with the Princess. First four lines of ‘Burbank…’ run thus:

Burbank crossed a little bridge
Descending at a small hotel;
Princess Volupine arrived,
They were together and he fell.

(Poems, 1920)

Irony and satire are levelled against women at large through Volupine’s jilted love affair. F. W. Bateson comments:

“On the surface the poem itself is a miniature comic drama describing Burbank’s brief love affair with the Princess Volupine and his displacement in her favors first of all by his compatriot Bleistein (‘Chicago Semite Viennnese’) and then by Sir Ferdinand Klein, a knight-errant presumably of Lloyd George’s creation. But this simple story of feminine infidelity is narrated in the poetic diction of high ironic scholarship.”

The same sensuality, voluptuousness and feminine infidelity are reflected in Das’s ‘Mahila’:

Unishso beallish sale ese unishso panchisher jeeb-
Sei nari apanar hanshiswetrirangsa ramatong kathi
Se na hole mahakal amader raktchenke niye ,
Bar kore nito na ki janasadharanbhabesakarin!

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[That woman of 1925, after reaching in 1940, is as stiff as her white-swan lust for sex. If that was not the case, had not eternity filtrated our blood like common ‘sakarin’]

(‘The Lady’, Bela Abela Kalbela [Time Wrong Time Inauspicious Time])

Princes Volupine of Eliot and the woman with ‘hanshiswet rirangsa’ of Das are identical. Both have been treated with contempt, callousness and a deep sense of nausea. Das’s violence against women and his aversion to female body culminate in ‘Monobeej’where he describes the transient nature of physical beauty and charm of ‘apsara’, ‘urbashi’ which decline soon with the passage of time:

Dainir mangsher moton
Aj tar jangha aar stan;
Badurer khadder moton
Ekdin hoye yabe;
Ye sab machhira kalo mangso khai-tare chinre khabe.

[Today her thighs and breasts are like the flesh of witches. One day it would be like the food of bats. Those flies that eat black flesh- will tear and eat up their flesh.]

(‘Mind’s Seed’, Mahapritivi)\textsuperscript{94}

Das’s presentation of the decaying nature of the transient external beauty of female body is not a mere account of the nature’s law. The feminine physical beauty, its gradual decay, is described in the last five lines of the above extract with immense hatred and violence. Similar apathy and abhorrence for female body is found in Eliot’s description of Tiresias in The Waste Land:

I Tiresias, though blind throbbing between two lives
Old man with wrinkled female breast, can see
At the violent hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward and brings sailor home from sea.

Though the extract has immense value of historical and cultural importance, Eliot’s description of Tiresias’ ‘wrinkled female breast’ is striking. Eliot used women throughout as mere sexual object to attain poetic effect. Rarely does he show respect and reverence to the fair sex. His deep sense of disregard of and disgust for carnal love is presented through the famous ‘clerk-typist’ episode and here too the woman is highlighted more cynically than the man. Although the cardinal concern is the cultural degradation and debasement, the sterility and emptiness of carnal love is focused. The sordid atmosphere of the lady’s room, her welcome mood of the clerk and the clerk’s seduction of the lady, her loveless casual sex - all indicate the poet’s misogynist approach. Eliot describes the moment of their sex thus:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavoured to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;

And the passage ends with the snatch of Goldsmith:

When lovely women stoop to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophones.

(The Fire Sermon’, The Waste Land)

The presentation of the lady as unfeeling, lustful, and careless, indicates Eliot’s male prejudice. Her response to the gross, indecent way of enjoying sex suggests her insensitivity, immorality and impurity, but the male counterpart is safely guarded as he is not discussed anymore after the event. He uses all his weapons of irony, sarcasm, and satire against women. The female figures he meticulously makes use of from history, myth and his own creation – are presented either as victim of male violence or the victim of the poet’s own phallic prejudice. In The Waste Land alone
Eliot presents a number of women as victim of violence in the past and the present. Some of them are Cleopatra, Dido, Elizabeth, Belinda, Cordelia, Ophelia, Bianca, Philomel, Hyacinth girl, Isolde, the Thames daughters of Spenser, Lil and the typist woman. The mythical female voices articulate their shattered human subjectivity. On the other hand, female figures of Eliot’s own creation have been victimized by his constant attack of sarcasm, satire and ridicule. Either way, women have been subjected to contempt and violence.

**Linguistic and textual violence**

Violence in language in the poetry of both Eliot and Das is an all-pervasive phenomenon – at the phonological, morphological and syntactical level; in rhyme and metre; in stanza division; in the use of typography and the use of vowel and consonant sound. Moreover, both the poets took in the strategy of heavy use of ellipses and dashes, using compressed expression and amalgamating various other languages in their composition which make their poems obscure and elusive. Very frequently both Eliot and Das mix up rhyme, half-rhyme and free-verse. Use of epigraph is another popular technique of both the poets, particularly Eliot. Eliot’s deft use of dramatic monologue gives new dimension to his innovative verse which Das endeavours to use in his poetry. Another important aspect of the linguistic and textual violence in their poetry is the device of setting plurality of voices and points of view to achieve aesthetic distance and universality. Moreover, this renders the meaning into different levels and layers of reality. From the pattern of their avant-garde strategy it is evident that both the poets consciously broke the traditional pattern of grammatical and linguistic order and turned their poetry into an apparently illogical and disarrayed shape. The staccato language, particularly in the poetry of Eliot, is both the cause and effect of violence.

Linguistic and textual violence in Eliot’s poems is a part of his poetic manifesto. He set out as an avant-garde artist and introduced a new note of modernism into English poetry by revolting against the 19th century poetic tradition and the Georgian poetry of the early 20th century.

Das too, repudiated the established linguistic pattern of Tagorean poetic practice and other conventional forms and usage of language that was in vogue in early 20th century. He gave a new lease of life to Bengali poetry by liberating it from
Das was an ardent admirer of Tagore but he consciously endeavoured to create his own poetic language. In this respect he was highly influenced by the 19th century and early 20th century European poetry, particularly, English poetry. As he was a professor of English, he was well associated with the latest innovative style, craft and technique of the English poets. Among the great English poets, W.B.Yeats and T.S.Eliot was his near contemporary. More over, they were the most cherished, versatile genius of the century. It is natural that he will be influenced by the innovative technique and method of these great poets of his time, particularly Eliot.

Eliot’s complete breaking away from the 19th century poetic tradition and setting up a new idiom, order, text and semantic in his poetry creates revolution. Readers taste a sort of epiphanic experience immediate after experiencing the sudden clatter and clash of words and meanings, complete disregard for conventional textual norms and rhyme scheme. Linguistic violence in both Eliot and Das get a new dimension in their innovative experimentation in rhetoric and diverse other usages of language.

Both the poets profusely infuse alien words in their verse. In this regard, both the poets show scanty regard for rules and conventions. Both used words and expressions that suit their purpose in creating effect. Eliot is a past-master in using foreign language in his poems. In modern English poetry he set this example. Eliot uses a number of European languages, not in translated but in original form. He even dares to amalgamate Sanskrit and Japanese language in his poems. This creates an upheaval among the men of letters throughout the globe. Eliot seems to redefine the codes of poetry writing that liberate the poets to write according to the demands of poetry and time. He seems to declare that poets are no more under rigid rules and orthodox bondage. He emphasizes not on the superstructure, but on the spirit and essence, that is the soul of poetry. Eliot freely uses words and phrases from Greek, Latin, French, German and many other languages. He mixes up not only words and phrases, but sometimes whole passage or stanza from the works of other world languages and from various fields of study, like history, myth, science, religion, philosophy, psychology, culture and tradition of world civilization. This makes his poems elusive, allusive and obscure. Edmund Wilson comments about this special feature of Eliot’s poems:
“And Eliot had, in his early poetry, introduced phrases from Shakespeare and Blake for purposes of ironic effect. He has always, furthermore, been addicted to prefacing his poems with quotations and echoing from other poets. But now, in The Waste Land, he carries this tendency to what one must suppose its extreme possible limits: here in a poem of only four hundred and thirty-three lines (to which are added, however, seven passages of notes), he manages to include quotations from, allusions to, or imitations of, at least thirty-five different writers (some of them, such as Shakespeare and Dante, laid under contribution several times) – as well as several popular songs; and to introduce passages in six foreign languages, including Sanskrit.”

How Eliot’s text is fraught with foreign languages is well exemplified in his early poem ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’. The six lines epigraph he uses is from Dante’s The Divine Comedy (Inferno xxvii, 61 – 6). Though English letters are used, Latin diction of Dante remains intact for the pervasive effect he wishes to create through the epigraph. The epigraph runs thus:

Si credessi che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mia tornasse al mondo
Questa fiamma staria senzapiu scosse.
Ma per cio che giammai di questo fondo
Non torno viva alcun, s i odo il vero,
Senza tema d’infamia ti rispondo.”

Even the lines comprising the dedication to the anthology Prufrock and Other Observations are from the same The Divine Comedy (Purgatorio xxi, 133-6):

Comprender dell amor ch a te mi scalda,
Quando dismento nostra vanitate,
Tra Or puoi la qantitate
tando l’ombre come cosa salda.’

Not only foreign diction, the poem is steeped in allusions and references, sometimes close and sometimes remote. In ‘The Love Song...’ alone Eliot echoes Dante, Virgil, Homer, Hesiod, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, the Jacobean dramatists, Keats, Tennyson, Russian novelist Dostoyevsky, renaissance sculptor and artist Michelangelo and many other remote references from history, literature, painting, religion, myth, legend and even topical scientific discovery. Assimilation of so many areas of knowledge, study and languages in a single work of poetic form requires great power for a poet. Such amalgamation was revolutionary. Literary circle throughout the world was gasped in amazement; charmed and surprised by his unique magical power of artistic innovation and craftsmanship. He brings in a revolution in the language of poetry. The dissonance and apparent disorder in language shocks the sensibility of the conventional readers, critics and poets of the time. Another famous poem ‘Portrait of a Lady’ alludes to James Joyce’s novel *The Portrait of a Lady*. The epigraph is from Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*. Both the title and the epigraph unfold different layers of reality. Here too, Eliot alludes to works and events ranging from the ancient past to contemporary time. ‘An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb’ (ll-6) refers to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The name of the Polish composer Frederic Chopin and his piano composition is directly referred to. The allusion to ‘lilacs’ ironically unfolds the story of the death of Jean Verdenal, his friend and fellow lodger in Paris, in the First World War. At the same time this reminds of the great American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and his poem ‘When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d’. Again the phrase ‘buried life’ (ll-53) is an allusion to Matthew Arnold’s poem, ‘The Buried Life’. In many respects ‘Portrait of a Lady’ is an ironic commentary upon Arnold’s poem and its world of melancholy and nostalgia. The buried life can also be anarchic, violent and aggressive. The poem alludes to such legendary character as Achilles. The violence in syntax lies in the manner of the narrator’s presentation of different planes of reality through constant shifting and merging of time and space and the identity of the persona simultaneously. The narrator once states,

Particularly I remark
An English countess goes upon the stage.
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
Another bank defaulter has confessed.’(ll-73-76)
Each of the lines represents different ages and different cultures. Again, the violence of the epigraph from Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* serves as an antithesis to the equipoise of the title. Extremes and opposites are here being played off against each other – the urbanity and sophistication of the Jamesian title against the brutality of the dramatic context of the epigraph: ‘lady’, with its connotations of class and social decorum, against the rudeness and directness of ‘wench’. In ‘Gerontion’ too, the use of allusions and the technique of the poem force the readers to engage in exploring the identity of the persona. The text is fraught with the great Biblical events of Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. Moreover, it enacts the states of desire, guilt and damnation. Gerontion’s failure is both erotic and spiritual. Gerontion is conscious of the duplicities of history. In spite of its immense power and strength ‘Gerontion’ remains obscure. Much of the obscurity is due to the linguistic violence, particularly the density of its allusions and to its intensely condensed, elliptical style. Of course, Eliot’s technique is to reach down to the deepest terrors and desires of human psyche as well as to the ‘contriv’d coridoors’ of human history to find verbal equivalent for obscure states of mind and duplicities of historical knowledge. Latin, Greek and French expressions and quotations are freely used as epigraph in many of his poems. In ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ the epigraph is a mosaic of quotations with Venetian association:

\[
\text{Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-laire – nil nisi divinum stabile est;}
\]
\[
\text{caetara fumus – the gondola stopped, the old palace}
\]
\[
\text{was there, how charming its grey and pink – goats}
\]
\[
\text{and monkeys, with such hair too! – so the countess passed}
\]
\[
\text{on until she came through the little park, where NIOBE}
\]
\[
\text{presented her with a cabinet, and so departed.}
\]

‘Tra …laire’ is a version of line from *Variations sur le Carneval de Venise* by Theophile Gautier. ‘nil …fumus’ is a Latin inscription in a painting of the martyrdom of St.Sebastian by Andrea Mantegna in the Academia in Venice. ‘the gondola…pink’ is from chapter one of *The Aspern Papers* (1888) by Henry James. The phrase ‘goats and monkeys’ is taken from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, IV. I. The phrase also recalls Shylock’s ‘wilderness of monkeys’ in *The Merchant of Venice, II, I* by Shakespeare.
‘with such hair too!...’ is from Robert Browning’s poem ‘ A Toccata of Galuppi’s’. so …departed’ is from the final stage direction of John Marston’s masque *Entertainment of Alice, Dowager, Countess of Derby*. This idiosyncratic use of so many literary and other allusions may be cited as supreme example of linguistic violence. Different languages and diverse cultural ethos are etched together in a single epigraph and the readers grope in darkness to trace links and connections among them which simultaneously lays bare several historical levels. Similarly, the Latin and Greek quotation used as epigraph to *The Waste Land* is drawn from the 1st century Roman poet Petronius’s play *Satyricon* and the dedication to Ezra Pound is from Dante’s *The Divine Comedy (Purgatorio xxvi,117)*. The tradition continues through ‘Mariana’ to *Four Quartets*. Eliot’s own confession regarding the use of language and his failure to learn the proper use of language is presented drably in ‘East Coker’ section:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l’entre duex guerres –
Trying to learn to use words, …

(‘East Coker’, *Four Quartets*)


bhagaban,- bhagaban, tumi yuga yuga theke dharechho sundir
O god, throughout ages you have taken the guise of a drunkard. Fill up the cup of millions’ life, the drunkard’s shouting is creating a loud sound on the wall of life’s waiting room.

(‘Standing on the Threshold of Life and Death’ Jhara Palak, [Fallen Feathers])

Like Eliot here, too, such extreme opposite words as ‘bhagaban’ and ‘sundir pesa’ are juxtaposed and yoked together. And the words ‘mataler chitkar’ hit hard to the asthetic sensibility of poetry itself. Of course, like Eliot Das does not use epigraph so frequently. The tradition continues till the end. Grammatical and sematic order is dashed in the following poem:

Ke yano uthilo henche- Hamider markhute kana ghoda bujhi!
Sara din gadi tana holo dher-chuti peye joyatsnai nijo mane
Kheye yai ghas;
Yano kono batha nai prithibite,...

[Someone sneezes- is it Hamid’s blinkered old horse! After the day’s weary pulls it blandly chews on a pile of moonlit grass without a care in the world.]

(‘Niralok’ [Starlight], Mahaprithibi [The Great Earth])

The sneezing of Hamid’s horse reminds Eliot’s ‘goat’s cough’ in Gerontion.

Linguistic violence occurs in the poetry of both Eliot and Das in their heavy use of ellipses, dots and dashes. Eliot uses this technique from the very beginning of
his poetic career. Eliot shows little regard for grammatical order and emphasizes more on effect. In ‘The Love Song…’ the technique is applied in almost each and every stanza:

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep …tired…or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

(Prufrock and Other Observations)

Das too follows this tradition of Eliot. In ‘Kono ek Joytsna Rate Bar Bar Sikarir Gulir Auaj Sune’ we find the use of dots and dashes and the use of irregular words:

Sunya ruda asunder: katabar ghurefire dekhitechhi tahader pathe:
Din-raat o bastita…galai jhulichhe dadi tarunir…joytsnar snigdhatal
bar bar gulir auaj
Ichchha hoy kono dur prantarer kole giye shyamapokader vide –
kas makha sabuj sarate
base thaki; abar natun kore gadi sab; abar natun kore godo tumi;
Bidhata tomar kaj sango hoi nai; …

[Empty, harsh, unfair: many times I have been seeing them in the street: day and night in that slum…the rope hangs from the neck of the young girl…again and again the sound of shooting in the serenity of moonlight. I wish to be with the ‘shyamapoka’ on the lap of a far distant field in green autumn. I wish to start anew; you start to make anew.]

(‘Hearing the repeated shooting of a Hunter in some Moonlit Night’)98

One of the noted examples of linguistic violence is the use of words and expressions at the concluding part of ‘A Game of Chess’:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Ta ta. Goonight.Goonight.
Good night ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night,
Good night.

(The Waste Land)

Grammatical order is totally violated. ‘HURRY UP…’ two lines refrain in capital letter continues. Subsequent part of the extract neither follows syntactical order nor any grammatical rules. Each of the expressions has oblique references and allusions. Eliot takes in this device for compression. His poetic shorthand in The Waste Land contains an inventive act of literary history which attempts to obtain tradition. His frequent use of ellipses makes his poems obscure but at the same time the irregular syntax and abrupt transition enact different levels of consciousness and refer to diverse historical and cultural ethos which repeats throughout ages.

Both Eliot and Das consciously broke traditional pattern of rhetoric as well as metrical scheme. They use rhyme liberally to suit their purpose. They did not confine themselves by rigid rules and literary dogma. In almost all the poems Eliot uses verse libre, except the quatrain poems in the anthology Poems (1920). According to the need of the verse he also freely mixes rhyme, half-rhyme and and free verse. Das also came out of the rigid rules of the Rabindric era and frees verse form its established set pattern. In almost all the poems of ‘Jhara Palak’ (1927) he follows irregular rhyme scheme. Das applies verse libre for the first time in ‘Kampe’ (Dhusar Pandulipi-1936). Like Eliot’s quatrains poems, Das also experiments with the verse form in Rupasi Bangla (1957). Here he tries his hand with the Petrarchan sonnet form. But Eliot is a rebel hero who destroys the existing linguistic and poetic formula immediate after his emergence. In ‘The Love Song…’ he not only introduces verse libre, but executes the technique so successfully that the literary world was spellbound. Eliot himself explains the relevance, importance and functions of verse libre in one of his essays:
“It was a revolt against the dead form, and a preparation for a new form or for the renwal of the old; it was an insistence upon the inner unity which is unique to every poem, against the outer unity which is typical. The poem comes before the form, in the sense that a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something; just as a system of prosody is only a formation of the identities in the rhythms of successions of poets influenced by each other.”

In ‘The Fire Sermon’ he mixes up irregular rhyme with free-flowing verse:

‘My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised “a new start”.
I made no comment. What should I resent?’

‘On Moorgate sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.’

la la

To Carthage then I came

(The Waste Land)

This is one of the finest examples of Eliot’s idiosyncratic use of language and rhyme. Free verse with caesura, rhyme, half-rhyme, prose poetry and even the repeat of the two phonemes ‘la la’ forming a complete line, and the quick shifting of place, time and persona are synchronized with magical poetic effect. Similarly in many of his poems Das uses ‘Misra Kalabritta’, ‘Kalabritta’, ‘Dalabritta’ and ‘Prose rhyme’ simultaneously. Some examples are ‘Janantike’, ‘Tumi’ (Banalata Sen) ‘Monobeej’, (Mahaprithibi) ‘Loken Boser Journal’, etc. ‘Manobeej’ is written in ‘Mishra

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Kalabrita’ rhyme, but the last stanza is written in ‘Kalabrita’. Similarly, ‘Loken Boser Journal’ is written in six syllables ‘Kalabrita’ or in ‘Dalabrita’- becomes a subject of debate for the linguists. ‘Shakun’, ‘Aghran’, ‘Sheet shesh’, ‘Ei saab’ ‘Ei Shanti’, ‘Pairara’, ‘Yeno Ek Deshlai’, ‘Bunohans’, ‘Nadeera’ look like sonnet, but in fact, they are written in terza rima. In this regard Debtosh Basu appropriately comments about Das’s use of metre and rhyme and their significance:

“Poet’s responsibility lies in his worship of expansion. Jibanananda repeatedly reminds us that the modern poets today bother least in the metrical measure of Iswar Gupta. Speed, not stopping; continuation, not pause are noted in the metrical scheme of this age. The poet must reach to the reader. Not right colloquial words of everyday speeches, but after reading the lines of his verse it seems to us, had it been possible to speak in poetry after Eliot then we would speak in that language.”

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Linguistic violence manifests itself in Eliot’s distinctive use of metre and rhyme. In this respect Helen Gardner finely remarks:

“The characteristic metre of Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) is an irregularly rhyming verse paragraph in duple rising rhythm, with more or less variation in the length of lines. Rhyme is used as a rhetorical ornament, not as part of regulara pattern; it is decorative and makes for emphasis, but it is not structural. There is, beside the variety in the number of stresses in the line considerable variety in the amount of coincidence between speech stress and metrical stress; but all these we are accustomed to in verse from the seventeenth century onwards. The underlying rhythm is unmistakable; it remains a duple rising rhythm, the staple rhythm of English verse, the basis of our heroic line, whether the line is short as ‘Remark the cat’or as long as ‘But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen’”

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The use of this metre is common in ‘Prufrock.’, ‘Portrait of a Lady’, ‘Preludes’ and ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’.

The volume *Poems* (1920) has abandoned the ‘Prufrock’ metre. In its place we have the blank verse of ‘Gerontion’. The heroic line is handled here with the freedom of the later Elizabethan dramatists. The majority of the poems in the 1920 volume are in quatrains. This common metre is handled with the greatest brilliance and confidence. *The Waste Land* (1922) reaches the zenith of this period of metrical virtuosity. Its basic measure is the heroic line, which it handles in almost every possible way. *The Hollow Men* (1925) brings in a distinctive change in his metrical scheme. The fundamental change in the metre has brought about his new freedom with the language of poetry. Here he uses the popular verse, such as that of the nursery rhyme, in order to parody ritual, and to recreate the effect of mechanical movement which enacts the theme of a spiritually enervated, death-in-life existence monotonously repeating itself. Eliot’s playing with language continues even in *Ash Wednesday* (1930). Here too, he breaks away from traditional use of rhyme and rhetoric. Allen Tate’s analysis is worth mentioning:

“If the six poems are taken together as the focus of a specific religious emotion, the opening stanza, instead of being a naïve personal ‘confession’, appears in the less lurid light of a highly effective technical performance. This stanza has two features that are necessary to the development of the unique imagery which distinguishes the religious emotion of *Ash Wednesday* from any other religious poetry of our time. It is possibly the only kind of imagery that is valid for religious verse today.

The first feature is the regular yet halting rhythm, the smooth uncertainty of movement which may either proceed to greater regularity or fall away into improvisation. The second feature is the imagery itself. It is trite; it echoes two familiar passages from English poetry. But the quality to be observed is this; it is secular imagery. It sets forth a special ironic situation, but the emotion is not identified with any specific experience. The imagery is thus perfectly suited to the broken rhythm. The stanza is a device for getting the poem under way, starting from a known and general emotion, in a monotonous rhythm, for a direction which, to the reader, is unknown. The ease, the absence of surprise, with which Eliot proceeds to bring out the subject of his meditation is
admirable...It is evident that Eliot has hit upon the only method now available of using the conventional religious image in poetry. He has reduced it from symbol to image, from abstraction to the plane of sensation. And corresponding to this process, there are images of his own invention which he almost pushes over the boundary of sensation into abstractions, where they have the appearance of conventional symbols.‖

The linguistic violence in *Four Quartets* (1942) lies in Eliot’s deconstructing the text and a new endeavour to reconstruct them again. Theme and form, rhyme and metre, diction and syntax – all take a chaotic shape. The rhythmical pattern of ‘Burnt Norton’ is elaborated far beyond the delicate melodies of the brief ‘Landscapes’. All the five apparently disconnected parts are etched together by the inherent thematic unity of the text. The second movement starts with a highly formal lyric; in ‘The Dry Salvages’ this is a variant of sestina, rising from the clang of the bell buoy; in ‘Little Gidding’ each of the three eight line stanzas ends with a refrain and thus Eliot signalizes his renewal of forms. The lyric in ‘Burnt Norton’ which is echoed perhaps too closely in ‘East Coker’ – is as pure musical incantation as any Eliot has written. The versification in the third part is the staple for the poems as a whole, a very irregular iambic line with many substitutions, of predominantly four or five beats, but with syllables ranging from six to eighteen. The fourth movement in every case is a short lyric, as it was in *The Waste Land*. The fifth movement is a resumption and resolution of themes, and becomes progressively more intricate in the last two poems, since the themes are cumulative and all are brought together at the close of ‘Little Gidding’.

Towards the final phase of his poetic career, particularly in *Mahapithivi* (1942), *Saat Ti Tarar Timir* (1948) and *Bela Abela Kaalbela* (1961) like Eliot Das too, turns to abstraction; formal symmetry in the use theme and form, rhyme and rhetoric, syntax and diction is substituted by an inherent integrity of exotic shape. Like Eliot, Das indulges in frequent use of inversion and refrain. Again, abundant similarity is found in their use of punctuation mark. Both are fond of using dots and dashes. Both the poets lavishly use interrogative mark and note of exclamation. The result is the

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emergence of new poetry – both in taste and appearance. Linguistic violence in both Eliot and Das first brings in chaos and then restores tranquility and peace.