Chapter – 1

The Writer and His Setting: The Growth of Eliot’s Socio – Religious Vision
Chapter – I

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T.S. Eliot is one of the foremost dramatists of the twentieth century. His contribution to drama is as great and significant as to poetry and criticism. But his reputation as a poet and critic has unfortunately tended to overshadow his importance as a dramatist. He is universally hailed as one of the pioneers of modern poetry, but when it comes to his achievement as a playwright, he has not been accorded the recognition that is due to him. No sensitive reader, however, can ignore the importance of the fact that Eliot chose to devote the major part of his creative energies to the theatre. It is very significant to note that Eliot wrote his plays in his later years when he had outgrown both the iconoclastic attitude of his early years and the devotional urge that overpowered him during his conversion. As such, though essentially an extension of the dimensions of his poetry, his plays reflect a maturity of vision that is seldom discernible in his poems, with the possible exception of Four Quarters. Moreover, what has been mere philosophical speculation in the poems, becomes experienced reality in the plays, and is therefore rendered all the more intelligible. There is yet another notable aspect in which Eliot’s plays enjoy an advantage over his poems. Eliot’s early poems deal with such existential concerns as loneliness, boredom, neurosis and hollowness of human life, whereas his later poems are concerned mainly with the exploration of religious belief as a possible remedy for these problems. It is in his plays that Eliot turns to an application of that belief to the problems of the modern man, striving thereby to attain a wholesome integration of religious belief and social, humanistic vision.

Recent critical scholarship has tended to affirm that the works of T.S. Eliot are deeply personal in nature, and therefore can better be approached and understood in the light of his life. Three profoundly authentic volumes of biography brought out by
Lyndall Gordon, and one by Peter Ackroyd, are among the most prominent studies which have awakened scholars to the fact that Eliot's poems and plays demand attention from a new angle. Frank Kermode unequivocally opines that having become familiar with biographical details, critics have "warmed to the notion that his poetry was after all written by a real person—indeed, that it is in a rather curious way profoundly autobiographical." It is important as well as interesting to note that this autobiographical element is more strongly marked in Eliot's plays than in his poems. No study of Eliot's plays, therefore, would be valid without taking into account the various situations and experiences of life that went into the shaping of his creative talent and the evolution of his religio—social vision.

A close examination of Eliot's works reveals that they are the product of an interaction taking place between his creative sensibility and his milieu. His works, therefore, may be looked upon as his impulsive responses to various situations and challenges which he faced in life, and which gave him both motive and direction to nurture his creative genius. It would not be out of place therefore to investigate the interaction taking place between Eliot's mind and his milieu, and to show how this interaction finally leads to the evolution of Eliot's unique vision, which interfuses religious belief and social vision, and which turns out to be a governing factor operating on various levels in his plays.

Born on Sept 26, 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, Thomas Stearns Eliot was the seventh and last child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Eliot. The atmosphere of his family was highly moral and religious. Angus Calder succinctly observes that the “ethos of the Eliots combined Puritanism, a tendency to free

thought, a strong sense of duty, commitment to public service, and faith in the value of education”. William Greenleaf Eliot, the grandfather of Eliot, was a man of great capacity and strong moral principles. Besides being the founder of a Unitarian Church, he was also associated with the establishment of a university. As Lyndall Gordon puts it, he “perfectly exemplified the Eliot family’s ideal of manhood, interfusing piety with public enterprise”. His ideals regulated the conduct of the entire family. “The standard of conduct”, Eliot later commented, “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 deviation from which would be sinful...” It goes without saying that the principle of subordinating personal and selfish interests to the general good of community, which Eliot imbibed in his early years, might have gone a long way to sow the seeds of social responsibility in him. In this connection the following remark of John Xiros Cooper is worth noticing:

In St. Louis the family tradition held firm and Eliot was raised to see his destiny in terms of a life dedicated to the highest cultural ideals, manifested in an ethic of service through established social and cultural institution. Throughout his life, Eliot never lost this sense of purpose.

Of Eliot’s parents, the influence of his mother was more profound and lasting. She had deep respect for her father – in-law, and brought up her children to observe the ideals cherished by him. She was herself a sensitive poetess, as enthusiastic social worker, and a lady of high moral ideals. She pursued interests, both in life and in her writings, which would have profound impact on her sensitive child. She always

5. Eliot’s Early years, p. 9.
encouraged literary aspirations in her son whom she considered exceptional. It was largely due to her encouragement that Eliot was able to write a brief life of George Washington when he was hardly seven years old.

Another noteworthy influence in Eliot’s family was that of his Irish nurse, Annie Dunne to whom Eliot was emotionally attached. Annie talked to him about God’s existence, and often took him to her Catholic Church which had an atmosphere completely different from that of the Unitarian church of his grandfather. The Unitarianism of William Greenleaf “denied the godhead of Christ, and stressed the social, moral and rationalistic aspects of religion”. As such, Eliot found himself in a state of conflict, a conflict between his instinctive leanings towards the Catholic Church and his obligation to conform to his family religion. The conflict was to culminate in Eliot’s ultimate rejection of Unitarianism in favour of Anglo-Catholicism. Eliot could not reconcile himself to the religion taught by his grandfather, because it was not in consonance with his idea of original sin, and because its emphasis on worldly success, thrift and intelligence tended to give it a materialistic character. He craved for a more satisfying form of faith which he eventually found in Anglo – Catholicism. It is important to note, however, that even after his conversion to Christianity, Eliot couldn’t entirely obliterate his Unitarian inheritance. The result was a unique assimilation of the ideals of the two, leading to the emergence of a unitive vision which is reflected in his later poems and plays.

Something similar happened in regard to the influence of Irving Babbitt and his humanism on Eliot. We shall discuss it in detail elsewhere in this chapter; here it would be sufficient to say that in spite of his later distrust of Babbitt’s secular humanism, Eliot assimilated much that was positive in it. The result was, again, an integral vision which emerges with an increasing force in his plays, and which tends to establish him as a Christian humanist.

Eliot spent the most formative years of his life in St. Louis, and was very much affected by its environment. The impressions of the urban scene that he received there, were to become integral to his works. Recalling his boyhood days, he wrote in 1960: “My urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed”.

The commercialization of life – its aridity and ugliness as evident in the city life of St. Louis – provided a waste land experience to Eliot long before the outbreak of the First World War.

Quite understandably, therefore, Eliot concentrates in his early poems on the horrors and emptiness of life, and on the need for transcending such a life. The poems such as “Preludes”, “Portrait of a Lady” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred prupock” deal with the sordid aspects of city life. The method of the poet, however, is to analyse and expose the emptiness and meaninglessness in the lives of the protagonists of these poems so as to underline the fact that the root – cause of their plight is not any social or psychological disorder but their divine alienation, their being cut off from their ultimate root. Thus, Eliot’s disgust with the sordid and the horrid as revealed in these poems is related, though implicitly, to the ‘overwhelming question’ of the ultimate meaning of life. Moreover, as Eliot later said, “the contemplation of the horrid or sordid or disgusting by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty”.

That Eliot was deeply interested in themes of religious import even in the so-called secular, humanistic phase of his career, is amply evidenced by some unpublished poems, which have been mentioned and discussed by Lyndall Gordon in her biography of Eliot. The poems such as “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” and


“The Death of Saint Narcissus” show that for some time around 1914 Eliot “toyed with the role of martyr, emphasizing the martyr’s abandonment of the ways of other men”, and in these poems he also set up “the notion of an Absolute or Pure Idea or Soul over against ordinary experience”. In another poem of the same period, entitled “The First Debate Between Body and Soul” Eliot called on the Absolute to rescue him from demeaning physical senses. Gordon perceptively remarks: “Driven by an as yet vague and inherited notion of perfection, Eliot made body and soul enemies and set up the uncompromising dichotomy that ordered his early life”. In his later life, it was this dichotomy that Eliot sought to resolve. This is particularly noticeable in his late plays in which he tried to reconcile the claims of the temporal with those of the timeless. But before he could evolve such a unified vision, he had first to explore and find his own belief. Presenting a clear and succinct account of Eliot’s religious growth as evidenced in his poetry, NarsinghSrivastavwrites:

From the will lost (“Prufrock” and “Gerontion”) to the will restored in its purified form (Four Quartets and Murder in the Cathedral) is the whole story of Eliot’s poetic progression, and it is in the course of this pilgrim’s progress that belief is negated, discovered, accepted, strengthened and established as the final truth.

In fact, Eliot’s emphasis on the final validity of religious belief was not a matter of sudden illumination; rather it was the product of deeply contemplated issues raised by various thinkers and philosophers who influenced him. Eliot’s intellectual make – up was a composite product of Harvard, Paris and Oxford.

At Harvard, Eliot came in contact with some very great teachers and thinkers who considerably influenced his intellectual development. The influence which was

11. Ibid. p. 74.
to be the most formative and enduring came from Irving Babbitt whose ideas of anti-
romanticism, inner control, dualism, and tradition went a long way in shaping the
growing mind of Eliot. Babbitt’s distrust of unrestrained individualism inspired in
Eliot a reverence for external authority, though Babbitt himself admitted of no such
authority except ‘inner check’. Moreover, Babbitt’s humanistic ideals exercised
tremendous influence on Eliot, and though in his later career he found Babbitt’s
humanism incomplete and inadequate without religion, he continued to cherish many
of its positive merits. In fact, Eliot’s poems up to *The Waste Land* are informed more
with the humanistic and anthropological spirit than with the religious, and even in
Eliot’s late poems and plays, the secular, humanistic ideas occupy a significant place.
This may be attributed as much to Babbitt’s humanism as to Eliot’s Unitarian
background and his anthropological studies at Harvard.

Another notable influence came from Josiah Royce whose concept of idealism
and faith in the Absolute seem to have deepened Eliot’s own quest for a
transcendental Absolute. Lyndall Gordon suggests that Royce’s method of relating
Christianity to human needs appealed very much to Eliot. The dependence of the
social order on religion for its survival, as propounded in Eliot’s *The Idea of a
Christian Society*, reflects the influence of Royce’s ideas.

Eliot’s stay at Paris lent him an opportunity to study the philosophy of Bergson,
which influenced his thinking to a great extent. Bergson’s concept of time – time as
flux and time as *duree* – and his assertion that the *duree* constitutes moments of
contact with the timeless reality highly affected Eliot’s own contemplation of time.
Eliot’s idea of the moment of sudden illumination, the “shaft of sunlight” during
which reality and meaning can be perceived, has a close resemblance with Bergson’s
intuition, at least on the level of experience. It must be said, however, that Bergson’s
concept of *duree* is only a starting point for Eliot whose idea of timelessness is finally
connected with the Christian revelation. Eliot was, in fact, concerned more with the
redemption of time than with the philosophical speculation of it. He wanted to find a
solution to the problem of living, and in this regard, Bergson’s *duree* could not help
him much. But, as Kristian Smidt points out, the value of Bergson lies in the fact that
he not only forced Eliot “to search but also helped him to find a solution”.\textsuperscript{13}

The study of Oriental metaphysics also contributed to the making of Eliot’s mind. The study of the \textit{Gita} and Patanjali’s \textit{Yoga – Sutras} reinforced Eliot’s stress on the virtues of detachment and self-discipline. The wisdom contained in lines such as “Teach us to care and not to care”\textsuperscript{14} reveals that Eliot’s religious ideas were considerably shaped and directed by his study of the Eastern philosophy.

Another notable influence on Eliot was that of the philosophy of F.H. Bradley whose emphasis on the reality hidden behind the appearance had a special attraction for Eliot. Bradley’s idealism and his emphasis on the Absolute as the real reality must have driven Eliot to a search for his own Absolute in God. Kristian Smidt rightly observes that in so far as Eliot “consciously strives to arrive at an understanding of the Absolute he may be said to be modelling his efforts on those of Bradley”.\textsuperscript{15}

The various philosophical influences discussed above contributed to the making of Eliot’s mind in that they helped him clarify his own position with regard to life, literature, religion and society. The greatest advantage was that philosophy trained and matured his mind and made it capable of criticizing its own experience. It engendered an intellectual discipline in Eliot, which was to be complemented later on by emotional and spiritual discipline provided by religious belief.

Eliot’s sense of the inadequacy of life lived merely on secular plane, his sense of the void existing in human relationships, was intensified by two events of crucial

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} “Ash Wednesday”, \textit{The Complete Poems and Poems}, London: Faber, 1969, p. 98.; hereafter cited as CPP.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Op. cit., p. 160.
\end{itemize}
importance – the outbreak of the First World War, and Eliot’s hasty and indiscreet marriage in 1915. The devastating effects of the War added to the outer monotony that Eliot had been feeling for long, whereas the strain and deepening misery of the unsuccessful marriage aggravated his inner monotony.

The War exposed, to the disillusionment of the entire society, the devastating consequences of the so-called achievements of science and technology. It utterly upset the order of personal as well as social life. “There was no longer” as Christopher Gillie comments, “a community of thought and feeling which all men and women shared, even in wretchedness, and the War displayed the fragmentation for all to see”.\textsuperscript{16} One of the most tragic consequences was that men found themselves in the terrible grip of a corroding isolation, no escape from which seemed possible. There was a total collapse of traditional values that held society together in the past. The sweet rhythm of human relationships was worst affected. Giving expression to this malaise of the times, Lawrence wrote in a letter to T. Burrow dated Aug. 3, 1927: “It is our being cut off that is our ailment, and out of this ailment everything bad arises… one has no real human relations – that is so devastating”.\textsuperscript{17} In fact, the War drove every sensitive intellectual in England and abroad into the discovery of the spiritual waste land that the erosive belief in progress had left behind. In one of his poems entitled “The Second Coming” (1921), W.B. Yeats wrote:

\begin{quote}
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the World,
The blood – dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned…\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

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\end{flushleft}
The perversion of values, intensified in the post-war society, shocked the sensitive mind of Eliot also, and he presented his own image of the modern waste land:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,...  

Apart from this moral and spiritual waste land, there was also a personal waste land in the life of Eliot, and this was caused by the miserable failure of his marriage. As mentioned earlier, Eliot’s marital relationship with Vivienne Haigh Wood turned out to be a case of incompatibility. Eliot was shy, self-conscious, and withdrawn while Vivienne was outspoken, demanding, and vivacious. But the worst of all was the sexual incompatibility. Lyndall Gordon clearly states that Eliot’s disillusionment with his marriage was “associated with sexual failures, and preceded his discovery of his wife’s chronic illness. Vivienne’s nervous and hysterical nature also added to their unhappiness. On the whole, the marriage left a scar on his heart and mind, and his distrust of women was reinforced by his unfortunate marriage to the extent that he came to regard a seductive woman, in the words of Lyndall Gordon, “as a man’s ordeal, a figure of sin with whom the man had heroically to consort”.  

It was only after his second marriage in 1957 that Eliot could know the taste of married happiness. His second wife, Valerie Eliot, finally drew him out of the purgatory into which his first marriage had thrown him.

No sensitive reader can miss to note how the sordid aspects of city life, the social and cultural malaise caused by the War, and the personal neurosis created by his unhappy marriage form the thematic pattern of many of Eliot’s poems written before his conversion. In *The Waste Land* we get not only a picture of the sordidness and spiritual sterility of the modern life, but also hints of a redeeming principle which

can break the monotony of such a life and restore meaning and purpose to it. As Bernard Bergonzi puts it, the underlying themes of the poem are “sexual disorders, and the lack, and need, of religious belief”. Eliot’s anguished concern to register a sick world and to make contact with something which might restore the springs of human goodness and vitality, as evidenced in this poem, was to become a characteristic feature of all his poems and plays to follow. In fact, all the poems of Eliot show “a profound and consistent concern for the human predicament” and the poet is at pains to demonstrate as to what makes life rich and what dries it up. This is suggestive of his peculiar humanism which manifests itself more clearly and convincingly in his plays in which the problem of human relationship receives a fuller and more satisfying treatment.

Eliot’s own life demonstrates that he was a practical and hard-working man who faced the ups and downs of life boldly, and never allowed them to despirit or distract him. Beginning with school mastering, he later worked in a bank upto 1925, when he was appointed director of Faber &Gawyer, in which capacity he worked till the very end of his life. From 1922 to 1939, he also edited issues of the Criterion. During all these years, he kept on his literary pursuits, and produced works of great merit and power. He had “a rare ability”, A.D. Moody says, “to make subservient to his poetry what to more romantic notions would seem preventive”. Not only that, Eliot also possessed the ability to make a creative use of the experiences that he got during his active and illustrious life which came to a close on Jan. 4, 1965.

The situations and challenges Eliot faced in life, and the experiences he had, filled him with feelings which can hardly be called pleasant. Thus, A.D. Moody

observes: "what he had to express as his deepest experience of life, was its vanity rather than any fulfillment, the burden of it more than the rare moments of release". The enervating experiences of his unhappy first marriage have already been mentioned. Here it may be added that Eliot's unsuccessful relationship with Vivienne rendered him incapable of forming any close and fruitful relationship until the last eight years of his life. Gordon has shown in his study how the first marriage always haunted Eliot and kept him in a painful state of conflict. Whenever he tried to develop intimacy with any woman, be it Emily Hale or Mary Trevelyan, he was prevented from doing so by the sense of sin associated with Vivienne. The learned critic maintains that "out of this conflict came the great works of Eliot's maturity, as he converts life into meaning in Ash Wednesday, The Family Reunion, Four Quartets, and the later plays."26

While the repercussions of Eliot's marriage were of incalculable importance, the offshoots of the War and Eliot's dissatisfaction with his family religion, coupled with his study of the various Eastern and Western philosophers, also contributed to the growth of his religio-social vision. His conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, as mentioned earlier, was a result of gradual evolution and consistent quest. As Robert Sencourt puts it, "From Unitarianism he lapsed into agnosticism, and out of agnosticism found his way (after inclining towards Buddhism around 1922) to the Catholic idea which he preferred in its Anglican form".27 As it was to be, religion became after his conversion the determining factor both in his creative and critical pursuits. Many people took Eliot's conversion as an act of betrayal. They accused him of betraying what he had previously seemed to represent. Their disillusionment is amusingly mentioned by Eliot in his work Thoughts after Lambeth. He observes how the Times Literary Supplement reviewer declared that he was a kind of traitor; if

not a lost leader, at least a lost sheep. However, Eliot himself remained unmoved by such reactionary comments. He had taken a decisive step of breaking away from the approved movement of intellectual thought in his time i.e. the scientific attempts to regulate the spiritual world. He had reached a more balanced attitude to life, religion and social relationships which is reflected in his later works, particularly the plays. Moreover, it was the Incarnational view of Christianity that governed his later works. The Incarnation, it may be mentioned here, represents the moment of intersection of time and Eternity. God, who was above the flux of time before the Incarnation, appeared in time in the form of Christ. The coming of Christ gave meaning to otherwise meaningless time. It is this vision of Christian revelation that we find embodied in Eliot’s later poems and plays. And it is this vision, again, which impels Eliot to strive to reconcile the timeless with time, the divine with the human. Hence, it is quite appropriate to say that it was the redemption of time that became the major concern of Eliot after his conversion, and that led him to the field of drama. But as early as 1921, Eliot wrote in his essay on Marvell: “that hold on human values, that firm grasp of human experience ……leads toward, and is only completed by, the religious comprehension”. The same sentiments find expression though in a more clear and emphatic form, in a letter of Eliot to Paul Elmer More written in 1928:

the void that I find in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations, and which there is only one thing to fill. I am one whom this sense of void tends to drive towards asceticism or sensuality, and only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting.

This seems to be the core of Eliot's attitude to life. He was of the conviction that the void found in the contemporary society was the inevitable result of Secularism that had dominated the life and thinking of man since the Renaissance. Driven by the hectic dream of material progress, people had ignored "the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life." Eliot emphatically asserts that unless and until the value of the supernatural is recognized, life cannot be redeemed. Modern philosophies such as socialism, fascism, liberalism, and secular humanism are heresies in the eyes of Eliot, because their glance is ahead, not up, and because they subscribe to the tragic faith that man is sufficient unto himself. Eliot does not deny the validity and worth of life – in – time, but at the same time, he asserts that it can have full meaning only in relation to timeless reality, that is, God. This relation of the human to the divine forms the basic pattern of his plays in which he sets out to examine the contemporary society and its problems in the light of his religious belief.

As early in his career as November 1922, Eliot said: "As for The Waste Land, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style" And the next year, he turned to the "new form and style" of poetic drama, when he devoted himself to the writing of the first drafts of Sweeney Agonistes. Eliot's reasons for moving to a new form were many, but he provided reasons consistent with his sense of social responsibility and his literary standards in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933):

The most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste – stratifications which are perhaps a sign of social disintegration. The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre.32

It is pertinent to recall that in the early twenties, Eliot was vigorously advocating the autonomy of poetry to the exclusion of extra-literary considerations. But in the thirties, he started discussing the question of the place of poetry and the poet in society, as also the need for applying "ethical and theological" standards to the evaluation of literary works. "The 'greatness' of literature" he now said, "cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards".  

In fact, an evergrowing socio-religious awareness is one of the distinguishing features of Eliot's career. This awareness was further intensified by the pressure of the contemporary milieu. In a 1931 issue of the Criterion, Eliot wrote: "And in our time, both temporary and eternal problems press themselves with an insistence which they did not seem to have in the reign of King Edward VII". Eliot was an artist who was both greatly distressed by the world's disorder and greatly concerned to preserve values. He took to writing plays mainly because he felt that drama was the only genuine medium of social and religious transformation. Poetic drama for him was a way to bring poetry to a larger public and to involve heterogeneous groups of people as audiences. This is suggestive of a significant drift in his creative sensibility which was trying now to assimilate the largest possible public in the scheme of redemption. A.D. Moody clearly opines that Eliot turned to drama "as his preoccupation with self-perfection expanded into a concern for the perfection of society".  

Eliot's dramatic theory is in consonance with his intentions and purposes as a literary artist. His desire to present through his dramatic design the integral vision of the natural and the supernatural is reflected in his idea of surface and hidden levels as practised in his plays. These levels signify that man has to exist on both planes at


once – the divine and the human. Eliot also wanted to appeal to his audience on different levels of consciousness. Hence he devised in the structure of his plays planes of meaning to match planes of understanding. Carol H. Smith rightly observes that “Eliot’s whole intellectual movement toward a social mission for himself as a poet which emerged during the nineteen-thirties is, I believe, the most important single fact in explanation of why he turned to the writing of plays”.  

Eliot’s option for the poetic and not the prose drama is, again, consistent with his view of life and of literature. We have already seen that his view of life is essentially religious. Eliot shows the same attitude with regard to his views on drama. In “A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry” (1928), E, one of the interlocutors, says that “drama springs from religious liturgy”. D, another speaker, says that “the forms of the drama must vary from age to age in accordance with religious assumptions of the age”. He further explains his point and says that “the drama represents a relation of the human needs and satisfactions to the religious needs and satisfactions which the age provides”. He points out that there should be some constant relation between drama and the religion of the time: “when the age has a set religious practice and belief, then the drama can and should tend towards realism ………..The more fluid, the more chaotic the religious and ethical beliefs, the more the drama must tend in the direction of liturgy”. Eliot, who lived in an age of “fluid” and “chaotic” religious and ethical beliefs, naturally wanted the drama to tend towards liturgy. Discussing the relation between Mass and poetic drama, B, one of the interlocutors in the ‘Dialogue’, makes a very perceptive observation:

We cannot be aware solely of divine realities. We must be aware also of human realities. And we crave some liturgy less divine, something in

36. Selected Essays, p. 47. 37. Ibid., p. 49.
38. Ibid. 39. Ibid.
respect of which we shall bemore spectators and less participants. Hence we want the human drama, related to the divine drama, but not the same, as well as the Mass.  

That explains the relation between the drama and the religion of the times. David Ward feels that these lines contain "the core of Eliot's dramatic theory". His observation seems to be perfectly correct when we discover how the integration of the human and the divine, the real and the ideal, is at the heart of Eliot's endeavours as a playwright.

This thing is perceptible also in Eliot's preference for the use of verse in drama. He believe that the "human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse". In addition to it, he is also reported to have said, in a conversation with Alessandro Pelligrini, that poetry is "the mode in which reality is experienced most profoundly". In an essay entitled "The Aims of Poetic Drama" (1949), Eliot wrote: "It is in fact the privilege of dramatic poetry to be able to show us several planes of reality at once". This is not possible in a prose drama. "The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse". In another essay

40. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p. 15.
“Poetry and Drama” (1951), Eliot clearly states the advantage that verse drama enjoys over prose drama. While prose drama can adequately express “the nameable classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action”, there is another area of human experience which it cannot express – “a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action”.46 This peculiar range of sensibility, according to Eliot, can only be expressed by dramatic poetry at its moments of greatest intensity.

It is noteworthy that Eliot’s pursuit of order in religion and society led him to a pursuit of the same in art, particularly in dramatic art. He believed that “it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation, and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther”.47 Taking the clue from the religious implications of the last line of this remark, Carol H. Smith maintains that the “fringe of indefinite extent” visible only out of “the corner of the eye” is “a vision of religions perfection as it exists in and out of experience”.48 She further remarks that the structure of Eliot’s plays is intended “to lead the audience to a sense of religious awareness by demonstrating the presence of the supernatural order in the natural world”.49 A.D. Moody expresses a somewhat similar opinion when he observes that the “action of Eliot’s plays arises from no ordinary kind of dramatic conflict, but rather from the contradiction of the sort of experience which is the usual stuff of drama by the religious vision cultivated in his poetry”.50 Eliot’s own observations in this connection amply illustrate this fact. Thus, in his essay on

47. Ibid., p. 87.
49. Ibid., p. 31.
Marston (1934), he wrote:

It is possible that what distinguishes poetic drama from prosaic drama is a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once ....or the drama has an under pattern, less manifest than the theatrical one.\(^{51}\)

Again, in his introduction to S.L. Bethel’s *Shakespeare & the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944) he declared that the contemporary poetic dramatist must create characters able to perform the same actions, and lead the same lives, as in the real world. But they must somehow disclose (not necessarily be aware of) a deeper reality than that of the plane of most of our conscious living.\(^{52}\)

In his lecture on “The Development of Shakespeare’s Verse” (1937), Eliot repeatedly speaks of the way in which the great speeches lift us “to another plane of reality or a hidden and mysterious pattern of reality appears as from a palimpsest”, so that we “see through the ordinary classified emotions of our active life into a world of emotion and feeling beyond, of which I am not ordinarily aware...."\(^{53}\) The nature of this mysterious pattern is indicated in the essay on Marston:

as we familiarize ourselves with the play we perceive a pattern behind the pattern into which the characters deliberately involve themselves; the kind of pattern which we perceive in our own lives only at rare moments of inattention and detachment, drowsing in sunlight. It is the pattern drawn by what the ancient world called Fate; subtilized by Christianity into mages of delicate theology; and reduced again by the modern world into crudities of psychological or economic necessity.\(^{54}\)

It is obvious, therefore, that Eliot took to the writing of plays not only because he wanted to reach a wider public but also, and more significantly, because he wanted

\(^{51}\) *Selected Essays*, p. 229.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 31.  
\(^{54}\) *Selected Essays*, p. 229.
todeemonstrate, in terms of character and situation, the efficacy of his religious vision. Though Eliot’s later career evinces an expansion and humanization of his religious interests, religion remains to be a determining and defining force. This is borne out by the fact that Eliot’s concepts of culture, society, tradition, politics and education are all coloured by his religious viewpoint. The following chapter is devoted to a discussion of these concepts with the hope that it will clarify the perspective from which Eliot’s plays are proposed to be examined in this study.