CHAPTER V

QUEST, CONFLICT AND LARK NIGHT
I said to my soul, be still, and 
let the dark come upon you
which shall be the darkness of God.

T.S.Eliot, East Coker.

In the previous chapter we had seen the picture of modern society which was totally barren. Eliot did not end his poetry on a dismal note. Though a vast majority was under the grip of death — in — life state, yet there was a minority group who struggled to rise from this mundane state of life. This particular group was composed of much intellectuals as were keenly conscious and sensitive. They had undergone the phase of romance and materialism which had failed to give happiness. Then came the phase of intense intellectual and spiritual search which has been named as the archetype of quest. The earlier attachments and desires had not been totally given up. The evil forces tried their utmost to pull men down, while the good forces were also
helping men in their effort to rise higher. This produced a state of conflict which has been called the archetype of conflict between good and evil.

Once this conflict starts, a state of tension and restlessness is built. The prevalence of this state produces such discomfort that man is forced to make a choice. The moment the choice is made the path becomes clear. However, the quester realizes that he has lived a life that was full of errors and even sinful deeds. Now, he has to undergo a process of cleansing in order to receive God's grace. The path on which the quester has to tread is one of hardships and suffering. But, all these trials are joyously accepted by the quester because they are a pre-requisite on the way to salvation. This state of suffering is the archetype of dark night which Jesus Christ had called the 'dark night of the soul'.
In this chapter, we are going to deal with the images and symbols that are related to these three archetypes – archetype of quest, archetype of conflict between good and evil and archetype of dark night.

II

Archetype of Quest

The archetype of quest is presented in its grandeur in *The Waste Land*. But some of the early poems like 'The Hippopotamus,' 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service,' 'Whispers of Immortality' and 'Gerontion' also contain the picture of quest.

In 'The Hippopotamus,' the archetype of quest to understand the true nature of animal life versus established religions set-up envelop the poem. At the very beginning, the poet has introduced the condition of the Church which needs awakening. Though the title is 'The Hippopotamus' which refers to animal state, yet it is the Church which is the target of attack.
The lines are –

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
.... While the True Church
remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist

(Lines 25-26, 35-36, p.31)

This image of the Church wrapt in mist and rotten material serves to reveal the inner rotten state of the Church. It only indicates that the Church is surrounded by mist of wavering faith and stale dogmas which make it unfit so, it will fail to perform its task of uplifting mankind. The hippo is an aquatic animal and is therefore associated with water and fertility.

A similar type of quest to delve into the existing religions set up is also seen in 'Mr. Eliot's

Sunday Morning Service.' The clergymen are debased and materialistic. Therefore, they cannot perform the blest task assigned to them. They can only make life sterile. The scholarly presbyters on the other hand are equally sterile. They can only fertilize religious controversies and heresies like Origen. The lines are —

The masters of the subtle schools
Are controversial, polymath.

(Lines 31-32, p. 34)

The 'masters of the subtle schools' are the presbyters who 'are controversial,' that is, unsettled and of shifting temperament on the philosophic plane due to excessive theories they have produced (they are 'polyphiloprogenitive' — capable of producing theories).

In 'Whispers of Immortality' the title is interesting 'Immortality' means beyond mortal or physical, that is, related with spiritual. But the juxtaposition of the word 'whispers' indicates that only whispers are left of immortality. Eliot talks of Webster and Donne who were questers and had the ability to penetrate beyond the life of flesh. The lines on Webster are —
Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin

Donne is described thus

Donne, I suppose, was such another
who found no substitute for sense,
To seize and clutch and penetrate,
Expert beyond experience,
He knew the anguish of the marrow
The nose of the skeleton,
No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.

Donne was a poet whose experiences of life made him mature. He is known for his love poetry as well as for his religious poetry. His early life was full of amorous experiences. So he was 'expert beyond experience.' He had the ability to 'seize' what he wanted, clutch it and penetrate deeply into it. But, he discovered through his experiences that there could be no substitute for 'sense.' Sense here implies wisdom. He was familiar with the pains of the body, which are called 'the anguish of the marrow' and 'the ague of the skeleton.' The bodily lusts trouble the body only. But, the spiritual thirst and anguish can penetrate as deep as the marrow, and,
can even be beyond the limits of the body and mind.
No physical relationship can lessen the pain nor satiate
the spiritual thirst. The condition of the quester on the
spiritual path is like Donne.

In 'Gerontion,' the old man has been a quester,
who has failed due to lack of courage. He is waiting
for rain which would give him joy and prosperity. This
waiting symbolizes his inner desire and quest for harmony.
He makes a thorough search within to find out the reason
of his failure in life. He accepts that he was 'neither
at the hot gates/Nor fought in the warm rain.' He agrees
that though he felt the need for 'a sign,' that is,
a vision of spiritual grace, yet when the word was made
flesh, that is, when people like Christ came to guide
men on the path to God's kingdom, then he withdrew due to
his wavering faith and excessive reasoning. He expresses
his state in these words

Think at last
I have not made this show
purposelessly
And it is not by any concitation
of the backward devils.
I would meet you upon this honestly.
I that was near your heart was
removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in
inquisition.

(Lines 5-57, p.23)
These lines reveal clearly the nature of Gerontion. He had led a materialistic life and avoided participating actively in other realms. His intellectual abilities created barriers in his relationship with women. He started questioning brought about a drying of emotions. He even lacked faith to relate with his Creator (God) though he had ardently desired to follow the religious path. But, he still waits for rain. Thus, he symbolizes—the archetype of quester who fails and wanders aimlessly in the maze of thought.

The Waste Land is a poem that reflects various mental states. It also presents the dimension of quest that is related to personal anxiety caused by honest penetration by man to establish an inner harmony between the body and soul, between man and society, between materialism and spiritualism and between reason and faith. It depicts man as an eternal quester and is related to archetype of quest.

To depict the archetype of quest, Eliot takes the aid of several myths. Thus we have mythological characters who become archetypal symbols, and, mythological imagery which is one again related to archetype of quest.
The most prominent character is the Fisher King and the grail legend. We also have a central character or the protagonist who is named Tiresias. This protagonist is also a mythological character. It is essential to know the background of both the Fisher King and Tiresias so that the central imagery and symbols related to archetype of quest can be understood properly.

To understand the meaning of 'grail' we have to turn to Jessie Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance*. To quote from her book —

As a first step towards the successful prosecution of an investigation into the true nature and character of the mysterious object we know as the Grail, it will be well to ask ourselves whether any light may be thrown upon the subject by examining more closely the details of the Quest in its varying forms, that is, what was the precise character of the task undertaken by, or imposed upon, the Grail hero, whether that hero were Gawain, Perceval, or Galahad, and what the results to be expected from a successful achievement of the task.... The distinctive feature of the Percival version is the insistence upon the sickness and disability of the ruler of the land, the Fisher King. Regarded first as the direct cause of the wasting of the land, it gradually assumes overwhelming importance, the task of the Quester becomes that of
healing the King, the restoration of
the land not only falls into the
background but the operating cause
of its desolation is changed and
finally it disappears from the story
altogether.2

The archetype of quest is portrayed in *The Waste Land*
through the protagonist, Tiresias. His role requires
analysis for he is a symbolic character. Robert Graves
in his *Greek Myths* present him thus —

Athene, though as modest as Artemis,
is far more generous. When Tiresias,
one day, accidentally surprised her
in a bath, she laid her hands
over his eyes and blinded him, but
gave him inward sight by way
of a compensation.

Eliot tells us that though Tiresias isn't a character
in the poem and is only a spectator, yet, what he sees
is the substance of the poem. Like Gerontion, he is a
recording memory and is also the quester representing the
archetype of quest. But, he is more advanced than
Gerontion. He is the Fisher King also who is 'fishing
in the dull canal'. Like, the Fisher King, he is old
and maimed. He too desires healing. So he unites the

2. Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance.* (Doubleday and
3. Robert Graves, *Greek Myths* (Cassell and Company Ltd.
London) 1959, p. 98.
quester (Grail Knight) and Fisher King figure in himself. In *The Waste Land*, Tiresias is the spectator as well as the quester.

The fifth part of *The Waste Land*, What the Thunder Said' opens with the archetypal imagery of spiritual quest. It is related to Christ's suffering before his final crucifixion. The poet describes this scene in these lines -

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places

(Lines 322-324, p.47)

Jesus Christ was in the garden of Gethsemane where he had undergone a night of spiritual anguish as he was preparing himself to surrender to God's will. His 'Sweaty face' is the picture of the archetype of spiritual quest and agony.

The next scene of quest is depicted in the passage on the journey to Emmaus. The lines are -

Who is the third who walks always beside you? When I count, there are only you and I together But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking besides you,
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
But who is that on the other side of you?

(Lines 360-366, p.48)

B.C. Southam gives the source of this passage thus:

Eliot notes that these lines were stimulated by the account (in South, 99, by Sir Ernest Shackleton) of an Antarctic expedition on which the exhausted explorers were haunted by the delusion that there was one more person with them than could be counted. 4

Grover Smith finds a parallel in a Buddhist legend in H.C. Warren's *Buddhism in Translations* and feels that it could have influenced Eliot while he was writing this passage. The tale is about a wise man who meets a woman on the way. He asks her for alms but she laughs at him. Her teeth are displayed which makes the wise man attain sainthood because he realizes that the body

is impure and consists of naked bones only. After some time her husband meets the saint and enquires whether he had seen his wife. The saint replies -

Was it a woman, or a man
That passed this way? I cannot tell
But this I know, a set of bones
Is travelling on upon this road. 5

These sources point out that on this torturous journey (archetypal imagery of quest for salvation) the questers get so frustrated, exhausted and troubled that even the actual God, who has risen, is not recognized. They fail to understand that rebirth is possible only through sacrificial death.

In 'Ash Wednesday', the protagonist searches his life and prepares himself to make a spiritual journey. The title 'Ash Wednesday' is most appropriate. For the Christians, this is the time when they observe a fast of forty days and pray to God. This is the period when they look back at their sins, repent for it and perform penance so as to purify themselves.

The poet too appears to be experiencing a phase in life which makes demands from him to reanalyze his life, accept his sins and shortcomings, and, try to re-shape and re-orient his life. The poet makes an honest interrogation and expresses it through suitable images and symbols. The opening lines of the poem express this quest —

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive towards such things.

(Lines 1-5, p.55)

The poet tells us that he has no hopes left as far as the worldly realm is concerned. He will 'no longer strive towards such things' nor desire 'this man's gift and that man's scope. He cannot 'turn' towards the world.

In 'Ash - Wednesday', the poet has come a long way ahead. The direction of quest is now clear. Instead of worldly achievements, the poet desires union with God. His state is in transition. He is rejecting the materialistic life and trying to 'turn' towards spirituality.
This thought magnifies in the next lines —

Because I know that time is
always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only
for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are

(Lines 16-20, p. 55)

Now the poet talks about the boundaries of time and place. He understands well that any experience is intense for only some time and has significance for only people of a limited place. The same experience may not have any value for people of other places. Even for the person who undergoes the experience, after the passage of time, the experience loses depth. Therefore, the poet emphasizes that 'time is always time.... place is always and only place' and whatever appears to be actual is 'actual for one time/
And only for one place! This realization of the transitoriness of life makes the poet accept things 'as they are'. What had appeared as a latent note of despair in his brooding, now converts into a feeling of rejoicing. The joy springs from the fact that now he can look forward to a higher dream of spiritual life.

In 'Journey of the Magi,' the title is symbolic
and is clearly related to archetype of spiritual quest. It recalled the story of the Magi in the Bible. When Jesus Christ was born, three wise men from the East went to offer their respects to Christ. The Magi represent the priestly class and have deep religious knowledge for which they are revered. It is believed that the journey performed by the Magi was full of joy because their hearts were full of spiritual fervour. However, in the seventeenth century different ways of looking at this journey were found. Lancelot Andrewes, while preaching before King James I, in the nativity sermon in 1622, described the hardships encountered by the Magi in their journey. Eliot presents this attitude in his 'Journey of the Magi!' Here, one of the Magi remembers the ordeals of the journey they had performed long after the incident. Since the poem deals with 'Journey,' the dominant archetype is that of the journey or quest.

The opening lines of the poem are:

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.  

(Lines 1-5, p.65)
The journey's difficulties are described aptly here. The weather at that time was very cold because it was December. It was the 'very dead of winter,' The journey was long one certainly, it wasn't the right time to go on a journey.

The next lines describe the troubles in the journey -

And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory, Lying down in the melting snow. There were times we regretted The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces, The the camel men cursing and grumbling

(Lines 6- 0, p, 65)

The camels were tired and were unable to walk in the melting snow because of their sore feet. To add to their misery was the nostalgic memory of their home and the comforts of family life which is described in the lines - 'The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces, And the silken girls bringing sherbet'. Their camel men and servants too are not co-operative. They start grumbling and demand 'liquor and women.' The entire imagery presents the tortures in the journey.
In the concluding lines of 'Little Gidding,'
Eliot urges men to be questers. He says -

We shall not cease from exploration

(Line 240, p. 45)

The poet insists that men should go on exploring in the spiritual realm. This line reminds us of Tennyson’s Ulysses where Ulysses asks his companions to move on to the last voyage. But the difference between the two journeys is clear. Eliot’s exploration is related to the archetype of quest or journey in the spiritual field. Ulysses presents material sphere as far as journey is concerned.

III

Archetype of Conflict between Good and Evil

In the state of quest, man always faces the conflict between good and evil. The world of evil is represented by the carnal desires, whereas the good is the religious life and the moral standards decided by society. This conflict is seen even in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Trufrock' and 'Portrait of A Lady.' In both the poems
the protagonist is torn between his desire of love for the woman and the moral bindings of society. However, a clear turn in the nature of quest is detected in poems written after 9/16. The protagonist now has to choose between flesh and religion. Earlier, it was choice between a beloved person and moral norms of society.

In 'The Hippopotamus,' the poet strives to understand the nature of good (the Church, as believed by society) and evil (the hippopotamus, the animal world).

The hippo is bound to be looked down upon by man who is a moral being. Therefore, the assessment about the hippo's state is aptly expressed in these lines -

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends

(Lines 9-10, p. 30)

The Church is the antithesis to the hippo. The lines describing the Church are placed immediately after the description of the hippo at every stage.

Thus -

Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
Susceptible to nervous shock.
While the True Church can never fail
For it is based upon a rock.

(Lines 5-8, p. 30)
Here, the hippo is shown as weak because it is only 'flesh and blood'. In contrast, the True Church is as strong and firm as a rock and 'can never fail'.

But, this is the surface picture. Eliot later presents the holiness of the Church which is corrupt, and is unable to perform the task of guiding men towards God. On the other side, the hippo has the potential to attain God's grace. Thus, the conflict between good and evil is resolved in 'The Hippopotamus'.

In 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' the debate between the established Church or spirit and life of flesh is again continued. The clergy represent the Church while Sweeney represents the world of lust. Once again Eliot attacks these clergymen who are corrupt and cheat men. He prefers the life of men like Sweeney who are honest at least. The lines are -

Sweeney shifts from ham to ham
stirring the water in his bath.
The masters of the subtle schools
Are controversial, polymath.

(Lines 29-32, p. 34)
The 'masters of the subtle schools' are the presbyters who 'are controversial', that is, unsettled and of shifting temperament on the philosophic plane due to excessive theories they have produced (they are 'polyphiloprogenitive capable of producing theories). The clergymen are also of shifting temperament due to their greed. Their life is more shifting, that is, unstable, than Sweeney's ability to stir the water in, the bath and shift from 'ham to ham'.

Sweeney is the person with animal tendencies. His being in the waters of the bath tub shows his life of lust because water is a symbol of unconscious urges or sexual urges. 'Ham' stands for pig meat or flesh. Here it could be referring to the opposite sex. His shifting from 'ham to ham' refers to his physical relations with different women.

Sweeney is the human counterpart of 'The Hippopotamus.' The presbyters, specially Origen is somewhat like the cerebrate intellectual Prufrock.
However, the life of these clergies and presbyters is slow, stealthy and undeveloped like caterpillars who have not yet become butterflies. There is no 'stirring of water' in their lives. Sweeney is better than them.

In 'Whispers of Immortality,' Grishkin represents the world of flesh or evil, while Webster and Donne represent the world of goodness because they strive to go beyond the physical.

This conflict archetype is also expressed in Part V, 'What The Thunder Said,' in The Waste Land. The imagery is presented in these lines:

In this decayed hole among the mountains, in the faint moonlight, The grass is singing over the tumbled graves, about the chapel. There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home. It has no windows, and the door Swings. Dry bones can harm no one.

(Lines 386-391, p.49)

After the agony in the desert, the tedious journey with its nightmare vision, the quester succeeds in reaching the Perilous Chapel which has a Perilous Cemetery outside. The Chapel is called 'this
decayed hole among the mountains.' It is an'
'empty chapel' without windows and is 'the home
of the wind.' The imagery is of Hell. The
quester's ordeal is in its final stage. The Chapel
has terrible demons like the black hand that
extinguishes the taper and the dead body of a
knight on the altar (as described by Jessie Weston,
in the Chapter 'Perilous Chapel'). He has to fight
these evil spirits.

In 'The Hollow Men,' the symbolism
related to the archetype of conflict between
good and evil is presented in these lines -

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the kingdom
Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

(Lines 72-83, pp.58-59)

That part echoes Brutus's soliloquy in Julius
Caesar II, I, where he reflects upon his mw
procrastination in joining the conspiracy against
caesar - 'Between the acting of a dreadful thing/
And the first motion, all the interim is . 6
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream. Here Eliot
wants to tell us that there is a tremendous gap
between thought and action. It is very easy to
desire for a thing, to have ideas to create something,
to feel deeply for someone, but, when it comes to
action, creation and response then it becomes very
difficult. The inner evil forces always create a
barrier which Eliot calls 'The Shadow.' It may
be fear of failure also which paralyzes action.
Thus, the shadow becomes the archetypal symbol
of evil. It prevents people from achieving 'the
Kingdom of God' which is referred to in - 'For
Thine is the Kingdom.'

The hollow men even seek relief in
postponement by uttering - 'Life is very long.'
But there are also moments when their own life
appears to be an unbearable burden due to this
conflict, and, in such moments they feel that

6. Manju Jain, A Critical Reading of the Selected
Poems of T.S.Eliot (Oxford University Press,
'Life is very long.'

In 'Ash - Wednesday,' the conflict between good and evil is depicted in these lines -

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

(Lines 96 - 100, pp. 58-59)

Dante had mentioned winding stairs in Purgatory. This stair imagery is thus influenced by Dante. The stairs imply climbing, effort and ascent. They are associated with archetype of spiritual quest where man struggles to achieve union with God. Though he turns towards God, yet, he looks back at his past too. The temptations pull him down and he makes efforts to resist them. The situation is hard for him. There is suffocation in 'the fetid air' and he struggles ('the same shape twisted' - is the poet himself) 'with the devil of the stairs.'
This imagery is found in these lines too -

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair,
Lilac and brown hair,
Distraction, music of the flute,
Distraction, music of the flute,
Steps and steps of the mind over third stair.

(Lines 107-125, p. 59)

The fruit and floral imagery is associated with sexuality. It is associated with the archetype of shadow or undying beast, that is, the world of flesh which the devout Christian mind repudiates. The nature of temptation on the third stair is clear. It provides a view through a 'slotted window' which is 'bellied like the fig's fruit.' V.N. Mishra remarks,

The image brings together distinct suggestions of female sexuality and fruition, in the word 'bellied' in combination with 'slotted' and 'fig.

The scene across this window is a pastoral one with Priapus dressed in 'blue and green' and playing on his 'antique flute.'

Amongst this romantic scene, appears a female whose brown hair is blowing over her mouth. This fresh picture of blooming life and love attracts the poet. But he feels that he is not worthy for it and regards it as distraction on his path towards God. The speaker realizes that he is not totally free of passions. Therefore, he utters that he 'is not worthy' to receive God's grace.

The archetype of conflict is also expressed in these lines -

Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between
Hour and hour, word and word,
Power and power, those who wait
In darkness?
... those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and
deny between the rocks.

(Line: '70-74, .80-82
pp. 62-63)

The poet admits that the sinners have offended
Virgin Mary though they had desired to choose her. Their state marks a split because of their wavering faith, fear and inability to surrender. Thus, they 'chose' and even 'oppose' the Lady. These are the people who are torn within. Though before the world these people declare their faith in spiritual life, yet, when it comes to facing the tests of spiritual path (the rocks) they again resume cowardice and deny the God.

The poet admits his conflict in these lines -

Although I do not hope to turn
Wavering between the profit and the loss

(Lines 197-198, p.66)

The protagonist now feels that though he has turned his back towards the world and turned towards God, yet, this turning is not a total one. He is faced by temptations which distract him. There is a similarity with the first part of the poem where the poet had said, Because I do not hope to turn again. However, there was more firmness in his resolution to renounce the world in the opening lines than now. Hence, the emphasis shifts from
'because' to 'although'. The word 'although' denotes weakness of will. The open admission of the waverer state is made in the lines, 'waverer between the profit and the loss'.

The archetype of conflict is expressed in 'Cheruses From the Rock' too. Eliot writes emphatically -

In all of my years one thing does not change.  
However you disguise it, this thing does not change  
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.

(Lines 62-64, p. 98)

In 'Burnt Norton', Eliot presents this image in the words -

... The word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation.

(Lines 186-187, p. 22)

Here, Eliot is referring to Christ who was tempted by Evil while he was undergoing great suffering and was meditating in the desert. This is an archetypal image of conflict between good and evil.
Finally, in 'East Coker' too this archetypal image is presented in these lines -

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantment.

(Lines 90-94, p. 25)

Eliot emphasizes that not only in the middle of their life but all along, their life, these 'quiet-voiced elders' face the mysterious life which is like 'a dark wood' (the allusion is from Dante) or like the edge of a grimpen (the allusion of grimpen is from Arthur Conan Doyle's Hound of the Baskervilles where Grimpen Mire is a mysterious tract) which is inhabited by monsters who menace people. There are also mysterious fanciful lights which create an enchanting atmosphere that can easily mislead men. This passage is governed by the archetypal symbols which depict the conflict between Good and Evil. Here the 'dark wood,' menacing 'monsters' and 'fancy lights' are archetypal images of evil forces which
lead men to their doom.

IV

Archetype of Dark Night

The quester often succeeds in resolving the conflict between good and evil. After this he has to follow a path where he has to encounter difficulties. The greatest test is to accept the dark forces within and struggle with them. This is a path of negation where man willingly renounces worldly pleasures and undergoes a life of penance and purgation. Jung calls it the 'night-sea-journey,' while saints have called it the 'dark night of the soul.'

The archetype of dark night is found in poems after the treat poem *The Waste Land*. However, Eliot does mention it in an early poem, 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' and even in *The Waste Land*. The lines from 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' are —
Under the penitential gates
Sustained by staring seraphim
Where the souls of the devout
Burn visible and dim.

(Lines 21-24, p.34)

In contrast to the corrupt clergymen who try to make money and the penitents who are insincere like the Jew Barabas, there is the picture of the 'devout souls' who are truly repentant and willingly undergo burning and dark life of the purgatory.

In *The Waste Land*, the quester undergoes a difficult phase. His ordeal is presented in this imagery:

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
.... Lead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
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
... If there were the sound of
water only

(lines 331-336, 338-343, 35), p. 47)

The landscape is of a desert with rocky mountains. No signs of life and greenery are visible. Life become as hard as a rock. Even the road is 'winding above among the mountains' - an archetypal image of evil because it reminds of the winding movement of the serpent. This symbolically indicates that the road to salvation is hard to find. The path on which the people tread is not a straight path.

The protagonist, who is a quester, belongs to this category of general mob. Though he has realized his mistake and is now fed up with his life which is the archetype of death-in-life, he discovers that it is difficult to rise out of this death-like state. He does make an effort. These lines reveal his quest. He is tired with walking and climbing and desires water to quench his thirst. But there is no water in the mountains. The tension and
trouble increase because there is 'not even silence.' His yearning for water acquires such intensity that he is ready to be deceived by the sound of water and says, 'If there were the sound of water only.' Certainly, this imagery is related to archetype of dark night.

The quester also encounters strange sights which are frightening. There are falling cities too. This reminds us of the journey to Perilous Chapel in Jessie Weston's grail legends. When the knight travelled to the Grail Castle and the Perilous Chapel, his courage and sincerity were put to test. Grover Smith comments

... the mertuary atmosphere is indication enough - a descent into the grave, into the regions of the dead, so that the initiate may achieve spiritual knowledge... In The Waste Land the quester hardly wishes to penetrate to a deeper hell than the one he is already in, but he must try to make a spiritual descent which shall be a spiritual ascent.... For, as in the scheme which Eliot was to adopt much later, 'the way up and the way down are one and
the same. 8

In 'The Hollow Men' a passing reference is given to archetype of dark night. Eliot writes -

Those who have crossed with direct eyes, to death's other kingdom.

(Lines 13-14, p. 56)

The poet introduces men who are like kurtz. They have accepted the dark forces within them and have agreed to undergo the process of purgation or 'dark night.'

In 'Journey of the Magi,' the imagery is associated with dark night. The lines are -

And the night - fires going out, and the lack of shelters, And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly And the villages dirty and charging high prices A hard time we had of it.

(Lines 2-5, p. 65)

The quester (here the Magi) finds that the nights are cold because the 'night-fires' do not last long enough to provide warmth. To add to the troubles, there is no shelter. As if these situations are not enough to try a man's patience, there is the trouble of hostile cities, unfriendly towns and dirty villages which charge 'high prices'. We can easily perceive that a spiritual man finds people cold towards him.

In 'Ash-Wednesday,' the archetype of dark night finds full expression. The poet says -

I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
.... And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself
I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us.

(Lines 21-23, 27-33, p.56)

The 'blessed face' and 'voice' is that of a
beloved woman. He is preparing himself to live
a life of exile from worldly pleasures and temptations.
He has 'to construct something.' This something
is his own life.

The poet prays to God to be merciful.
He is torn by a sense of sin and wrong which makes
him debate with himself. He desires to forget
these conflicts and prays to God to help him. The
protagonist is full of repentance for 'what is done'
and badly desires that it should not 'be done again.'
The us are the sinners who pray to God to be kind
so that the 'judgement' may not be 'too heavy'
for them.

The plight of the sinners is terrible.
Lyndall Gordon emphasizes the personal aspect of
the poet's suffering and comments

Eliot's essays of this time
seem to vibrate with personal
import as in '93' when he fastens
on certain lines which surely
no man or woman past their
youth can read without a
twinge of personal feeling
O God! O God! that it were
possible
To undo things done, to call
back yesterday....9

The poet prays to God further and seeks God’s help.
The lines are -

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

(Lines 34-35, p. 56)

The protagonist prays to God to teach people to
sit still. Here ‘sitting still’ is associated
with patient acceptance of God’s will and turning
away from the hectic materialistic life.

The first poem of ‘Ash - Wednesday’ ends
with a prayer, to Virgin Mary to intercede on behalf
of the sinners and help them at the time of their
death. Actually, the entire poem is associated with
the archetype of spiritual quest and the archetype
of the ‘dark night of the soul.’ It is a state of
transition. The world of senses is rejected while
an effort is made to move into the spiritual world.

University Press, 1980), p. 38
The imagery of dark night continues in these lines —

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below,
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Lamp, jagged, like an old man's mouth
drivelling, beyond repair
Or a toothed gullet of an aged shark.

(Lines 02-06, p.59)

As the protagonist faces the 'second turning of the second stair,' he succeeds in leaving the twisted shapes which remind one of serpent-figure, the archetype of evil. The atmosphere is dark, like a nightmare. Eliot uses appropriate similes here — 'an old man's mouth drivelling beyond repair' and 'a toothed gullet of an aged shark.' These images are related to the archetype of evil which is to be found within each person. In the stage of dark night, they have to be accepted and finally conquered.

The dark night is again described aptly in this image —
In this brief transit where
the dream crossed twilight between
birth and dying

(Lines 199-209, p. 66)

The protagonist experiences a 'twilight state'
where dreams of the world cross. He has to face
the 'dark night of the soul', the stage 'between birth
and dying.' It is birth of spiritual life and death
of material life.

The next lines elaborate this state -

This is the time of tension between
dying and birth
The place of solitude where
three dreams cross
Between blue rocks.
But when the voices shaken
from the yew - tree drift away
Let the other yew be shaken
and reply.

(Lines 214-218, p. 64)

In spite of the temptations, the protagonist is
aware that it is a state of 'tension' and conflict.
The old has to die if the new has to be born. In
'solitude' there are three dreams which 'cross
between blue rocks.' The three dreams are dark,
light and twilight while the blue rocks symbolize
the spiritual path. There are two yew trees mentioned now. The first stands for mortal world. When the 'voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away,' that is, when the penitent sinner succeeds in leaving the world of flesh, then he request the 'other yew' tree to shake and reply.

In the 'Four Quartets' we find a more developed imagery as far as archetype of dark night is concerned. The lines from 'Burnt Norton' are –

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world,
Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Dissipation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit,
This is the one way ....
.... abetention from movement,
while the world moves

(Lines 145-153, pp. 20-21)

This path demands delving deep into the darkness of one's inner self. Here one has to 'descend lower' into the 'world of perpetual solitude.' It is a sort of cessation of all outward movement and withdrawal
from whatever is considered 'worldly.' All desires to possess wealth and property, all the sensual urges, all the fancies and dreams have to be given up on this path. One has to close the door that leads to worldly comforts and company and encounter one's own dark self. Therefore, it is called the 'world of perpetual solitude,' 'internal darkness' and 'that which is not world.' Here, the imagery is related to the archetype of dark night. This is one way which helps one to rise out of the death-in-life. Ultimately this leads to abstention from movement though for other the world moves in appetency.'

In 'East Coker,' the archetypal imagery of dark night is elaborated. We first came across this imagery in these lines -

... Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving
the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark
in the afternoon,
... And the deep lane insists
on the direction
Into the village, sha in the electric heat
Hypnotised. In a warm haze the sultry light
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.
The dahlia sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl.

(Lines 14-23, p. 123)

We are now taken to a specific place. It is 'the open field' where light is falling. But the way to this open field is through 'the deep lane' which is 'shuttered with branches.' Since the shade of the trees shut the sunlight it is dark even in the afternoon. But, it still takes to the open field and 'insists on the direction.' The heat is electric and hypnotizes, the people. Though it is 'not refracted, by grey stone' and there is no pool filled with water from sunlight as in 'Burnt Forton,' yet, it is a preparation for a vision. The dahlia are sleeping in 'the empty silence.' We now wait for the 'early owl' because it is a scene of night that will be described. The dark lane, the sleeping dahlia, the empty silence and the early owl — all are associated with the way down, the path of negation which is associated with the archetype of dark night.

At another place in the poem, the poet says —
I said to my soul, be still,
and let the dark come
upon you
Which shall be the darkness
of God.

(Lines 113-114)

This darkness is the way of purgation, the archetypal symbol of dark night.

This imagery is fully developed in the next lines of the poem which are –

... As in a theatre,
The lights are extinguished,
for the scene to be changed,
With a hollow rumble of wings,
with a movement of darkness
on darkness,
And we know that the hills
and the trees, the distinct panorama
And the bold imposing facade
are all being rolled away

(Lines 115-116)

This simile describes a scene in a theatre. When a scene has to be changed then lights are put off, the curtains are rolled up which is described as the 'rumble of wings.' The artificial stage scenery of hills and trees also rolls away and 'darkness
moves on darkness.' Similar is the stage of the poet who withdraws himself from the material world and rolls up the curtain of life. After the withdrawal of the poet from the outer life, he undergoes a state which is vacant and dark. In this dark night, the only thing that can be done is to wait. This waiting has to be without hope or love because one always hopes 'for the wrong thing' and, human love is also the 'love of human the wrong thing.' Therefore, the poet says -

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope For hope would be hope for the wrong thing.

(Lines)

We are also told again that this path demands sacrifice of the material world. The lines that present the imagery of dark night are

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy In order to arrive at what you do not know you must go by a way which is the way of ignorance. In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossesson.

(Lines 139-143. P. 127)

Since it is the path of negative mysticism where one has to withdraw oneself from active participation in life, the manner of expression has to be paradoxical. Therefore, Eliot says that it is a way 'wherein there is no ecstasy'. One has to accept one's ignorance and 'go by the way of dispossesson.' This means if one wants to 'possess what you do not possess,' that is, spiritual bliss, then one has to give up or dispossess the material comforts. The language here is symbolic and is related to the archetype of the dark night of the soul.

To quote Grover Smith:

The third strophe renders the gnomic summary of the negative way in The Ascent of Mt. Carmel...
The tenor of St. John's lines is, of course, that the way to full knowledge, possession, and joy is utter denial of the self.

Elizabeth Drew also supports this point of view. She remarks, "And where you are is where you are not" points to the truth that the fullest consciousness is

reached by the fullest renunciation of the personal."

The negative way of dark night is described further in these lines:

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please
But to remind of our, and Adam's Curse,
And that, to be restored, our Sickness must grow worse.
The whole earth is our hospital.

(Lines 154-160, p.128)

The poet emphasizes the condition of mankind which is diseased. If they realize that they are sick and listen to the 'dying nurse' which is the Church, then they can regain health. The Church is in a dying condition due to the onslaughts of logical questionings which create

II. Elizabeth Drew, T.S.Eliot & The Design of His Poetry (Dorba House, Delhi, 1993), p.171
doubt and distrust. The Church does not try to please but points to Adam's Fall and reminds man of his plight. However, to regain 'health' or communion with God, man should accept this sickness and suffering which is redemption. In order 'to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.' The whole earth as hospital stands for purgation.

The state of dark night is described aptly in these lines:

The chill ascends from feet to knees,
The fever sings in mental wires.
If to be warmed, then I must freeze
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
Of which the flame is roses,
and the smoke is briars.

(Lines 164-168, p.128)

The way down, or dar night of the soul demands a cooling of the senses, that is, turning away from the sensual world. The fever of worldly passions disturb the mind. To get rid of it, the poet stresses 'then I must freeze/And quake in frigid purgatorial fires.' The fire of purgatory burns the passions and
freezes the senses. Therefore, this fire is not destructive. It has 'the flame' which 'is roses, and the smoke is briars.'

Eliot throws light on the nature of purgatorial fire in 'Little Gidding' too. He writes:

The one discharge from sin and error
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

(Lines 204-207, pp. 143-144)

The men who struggle to be discharged 'from sin and error' have to make a choice between these two fires - the fire of Hell or the fire of purgation. If man chooses the purgatorial fire then he can 'be redeemed from fire by fire.' The fire here is a symbol of dark night.

V

Conclusion

The images and symbols discussed in this chapter show us that spiritual quest is difficult. There
are very few people who follow this path. Initially, they are lost in the maze of thought and conflict between good and evil. They want to retain good and, find it hard to accept the dark side of their own self. But once the step is taken and the dark side is accepted then the path becomes clear. Though now they have to follow a path of negation where material comforts have to be given up, yet they accept the suffering with pleasure because they know that it will lead to salvation.