CHAPTER IX

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After what has gone before it is necessary to underline certain important points of view that have emerged from my study of Eliot's poetry. In my study of the poems of Prufrock and Gerontion groups the broad pattern of thought and sensibility has been found to be emerging with the consistency and implication of a metaphysical concept. In this context, and taking into consideration subsequent developments, if one observes that "the whole progress was almost predictable"¹ one should not be taken to be implying that Eliot really followed an already prepared blueprint of his poetic world. In my study the implied sense about such conclusions is that the Indian thought and sensibility that forms a perceptible strand in his response to the realities around did really make him aware of what he was doing and how this doing could be related to the social function of poetry. The concept of the witness self, above and over the working self, appears to have been emphasized in my attempt to define the nature of the implied consciousness that is found to be relating itself to a point of view outside the individual poems. My implication is that it is such a consciousness that directs the sensibility and very often assumes the part of the persona speaking in the poems. The feelings and emotions in Eliot's poetry are to be accepted only in the sense in which Nancy Hale conceives of

¹. Charles Noorman, "Order and Mr. Eliot", South Atlantic Quarterly, Jan. 1953
them: "They (feelings and emotions) are allied, but feeling, as
I am speaking of it here is neither hate, fear, anger, nor des-
ire: it is a method of perceiving."¹ It is this method of per-
ceiving that is related to the metaphysical concept of a wit-
ness self; and Eliot himself is very explicit about it in
Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H.Bradley:

And this self which is objectified and related is contin-
uous and felt to be continuous with the self which is
subject and not an element in that which is known.²

The lines just quoted are from the concluding chapter of Eli-
ott's dissertation on F.H.Bradley. In these lines there is the
same concept of the witness self as we find in the Brihadara-
nyaka Upanishad. The duality between the object and the subj-
ect, and that is, between the self as subject and the self as
object is important because the self as knower is Brahman.
This 'knower' cannot be known because that which is known
forms the part of the object: hence the question, "Through wh-
et, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?"³ A perceptive
reading of the poems right from Prufrock discovers that the
I-characters in Eliot's poetry are found looking at themselves
as if looking at an object.

Eliot's main concern in the poems is philosophical or

¹. Nancy Hale, Realities of Fiction, Macmillen & Co. 1963, P. 170
(Italicics mine)
². T. S. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of
F. H. Bradley, Faber & Faber, London, 1964, P. 155
³. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, (IV.V.15).
metaphysical. My observations, sometimes, appear to be emphasizing this aspect of Eliot's preoccupation as a poet from the very beginning of his poetic career. Besides it is clear from his own remarks that Eliot consciously set out to do what was done in alien languages:

Our effort is not only to explore the frontiers of the spirit, but as much to regain, under very different conditions, what was known to men writing at remote times and in alien languages.¹

Eliot's reference to remote times and alien languages is significant. One more point might be raised here. It might be said that Eliot did not have much to do with the universal suffering and agony in a Hindu sense. My study has emphasised the point that Eliot's diagnosis of our existential plight is done not only from the Christian point of view. There is hardly a picture of sin and evil raised to the dimensions of a Christian vision as we find in Dante. What we find in The Waste Land and Four Quartets is the viewpoint that human suffering and agony are a part of the cosmic design. Therefore, apart from the apparent allusions, the real penetration of the Indian thought and sensibility consists in reorientation of Eliot's metaphysical thinking. The essential aesthetic level in Eliot's poetry is influenced by such a penetration.

It is very much in order to note here that Eliot never thought

in purely Christian terms in his observations on human predicament.

At this point a reference to certain controversies regarding East-West penetration in Eliot's poetry will be in order. Mr. MacCarthy raises a pertinent question in his observation that "if a necessary condition of penetrating Eastern philosophical traditions is that of becoming (mentally and spiritually) an Easterner and at the same time ceasing to be a westerner, East-West penetration, in any real sense, could be no more than a rather unhappy delusion." The present study has amply illustrated that there is an East-West penetration in Eliot's poetry which, notwithstanding Eliot's remarks, is made possible because the poems are not created out of the feelings and emotions of an Easterner or Westerner; rather they are created out of an experience of enlightenment that was the product of the East-West penetration. There are critical opinions to show that in Eliot's poetic world and Indian might get the same acceptance as a Christian: "St. Augustine's City of God 'that does all the glory of God' may legitimately receive an even wider acceptance, that would put Arjuna among its citizens with other saints and sages ....... " There is a feeling in certain critics that Indian strains in the Quar- tetts introduce a kind of tension which is not finally resolved. Further, the general thinking is that Eliot was attempting

1. H.E. MacCarthy, "T.S. Eliot and Buddhism", P.36
a kind of synthesis which is not finally achieved. The emphasis on personal effort and spiritual self-culture is found to be conflicting with the concept of grace. We have already noted that there is no conflict as such. Further, the opinion that Eliot was attempting an East-West synthesis cannot be held tenable. It may be noted that Eliot does not seek to establish a perfect identity and similarity of the different concepts on the ontological level. He is suggesting the parallels to widen the perspective of the metaphysical problems and their solution. Hence the concepts are not presented for the purpose of logical arguments; they present only a unified vision of a higher reality apprehended variously in the moments of mystical insight by different seers. But all these points are put, as it were, round a circle equidistant from the centre and each point allows the same degree and level of reality. This process is like one very clearly described by Eliot in a different context:

The point of view (or finite centre) has for its object one consistent world, and accordingly no finite centre can be self-sufficient, for the life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them.¹

¹ T.S. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, Faber & Faber, London, 1964, p. 147
What appears to be jarring or sinuous in the Quartets is ultimately included and transmuted into a higher vision. The experience that creates this vision is soul-experience. That is why Kristian Smith feels that in spite of strains and counter-strains there is such a unified vision, where the Christian elements are refined beyond Christianity. Personal religious beliefs of Eliot matter least in the Quartets. The painful task of unifying the apparently incompatible and discordant religious elements and mystical insights has been attempted and a higher vision of reality presented. An analogue to the religious view presented in the Quartets is to be found in India where different points of view — Buddhism, Jainism, the yoga-system and so many other practices — are made acceptable and compatible because they all exist equidistantly from the central concept of a religion which is named Hinduism. The religious world-view in the Quartets is neither that of Hinduism nor is it that of Christianity. They, with other hints and guesses offered, form only different points of view all equidistant from the central concept — the still point. Any name given to such a religious world will be a misnomer, but it can be termed a spiritual religion, the religion of the soul. I may repeat that the experience that refines the different religious tags and transmutes them into the vision of a higher reality is soul-experience. Eliot’s poetry gives a view of a religion which, on its social level, is in the nature of what might be called international-spiritual-self-culture.
It is obvious that in Eliot's poetic world there are two highest peaks, equally prominent and equally interesting from the point of view of the Indian thought and sensibility. They are *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. The first poetic movement starting with *Prufrock* brings the poet to *The Waste Land*, and the next movement reaches the *Quartets* after which Eliot stopped writing poetry because he did not want to repeat himself. It is only in these two poems that Eliot's conscious formulations are most prominent; and it is also only in them that Indian elements are placed in the crucial positions. If the view that for the sake of a critical examination of Eliot's poetry almost the complete poetic output should be treated as one poem be accepted, there is no reason why the Indian elements in Eliot's thought and sensibility should not be accepted as present from the very beginning of the first movement. Eliot's readings in the oriental sources are found working at a deeper level which is related to Eliot's view of the highest spiritual achievement. As to his personal beliefs as a Christian, Eliot's poetic world is neutral in between Hinduism and Christianity. Eliot is a religious poet in this age of unbelief but his poetry is never charged with religious sentiments. Religious belief as such hardly appears to be Eliot's concern; his is a poetry about points-of-view, a poetry that tries to embody the age-old wisdom of the human race. He has clearly stated what it is possible for a man of strong convictions to do:

In a society like ours, worm-eaten with liberalism, the
only thing possible for a person with strong convictions is to state a point of view and leave it at that.¹

Eliot's considerations about the nature of time hardly accord with the Christian concept of history. Very definitely there is a strong note of Christian suggestion in his poetry. But Eliot is more a philosophic poet than religious. The very core of his poetry is metaphysics and his personal convictions as a Christian hardly interfere with it. Generally speaking, Eliot, in a way, falls in the line of the American Brahmins like Emerson, Thoreau and some others, (though I do not quite subscribe to such an opinion).

............. the unknown
Apostle of the Indians, Eliot ...

¹ T.S. Eliot, Preface to After Strange Gods, Faber and Faber, London.

2. Quoted by S. Musgrove, as an epigraph to T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman, University of Auckland, 1963. The quotation is from H.W. Longfellow, "Eliot's Oak".