CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSION & FINDINGS
Conclusion T.S. Eliot’s approach to poetry was new and revolutionary. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) declares its departure from the romantic tradition of love-poetry and introduces a poet who is profoundly conscious of his age. Here is a poet who felt that all creativeness lies in the realm of the spirit, that it arises from a state of mental suffering caused by spiritual stagnation and psychic sterility. He sees the choice for civilized man as between the pain of spiritual stagnation or the willing surrender to purgation, to the heavy toil of spiritual rebirth. The poet differs from others in the same environment in his awareness of the plight of modern man. Eliot established his reputation as the greatest force in English poetry with the publication of *The Waste Land*. The poem took the world by storm not merely as poetic masterpiece but also as the supreme self expression of his age. Helen Gardner writes:

“Although the Waste Land may begin with the dilemma of the modern mind, it discovers that the modern dilemma is the historic dilemma, and to limit the poem’s
meaning to being primarily the expression
of modern lack of faith is to mistake its
form and scope.”¹

From Eliot’s exploration of The Waste Land we see, as we
could not see before, the depths of its being. The new insight
and understanding offers a hope of release from the prevailing
desiccation. T.S. Eliot’s insistence to trace the evil in the world,
to the defects in human nature, shows his concern for the
humanity. His anguish, when he sees man being the destroyer
of mankind, is apparently reflected in his various works. Eliot
feels that it is the duty of a writer to express the chaos of his
society. As he says:

“Our present day ruin is the external sign
of a world religious crisis, and that
modern history can also be understood as
a metaphysical tragedy. What can the task
of art be if not to make this tragedy
known.”²
In these words lies the clue to the identity of Eliot’s mind and art. Eliot accepts the religious, moral, cultural and emotional crisis of our time. He is a strict puritan, who can not tolerate any kind of laxity in the moral behavior of the society. He is not satisfied with the way of mankind. He believes that man has to play a vital role in this universe for seeking the salvation of his soul- he has to affirm the spiritual values and discipline the soul.

It was an age that was changing rapidly as far as moral and religious and cultural values are concerned. People were lacking in any guiding faith that could provide them any solace and salvation. They were becoming morally and spiritually impotent. Thus it is quite obvious that they were degenerating day by day and it is in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* where Eliot has forcefully expressed the theme of nature versus degenerated morals. Helen Gardner writes:

“J. Alfred Prufrock’s Love song is neither personal, nor general, though in it the poet expresses a personal vision, and defines
what is perhaps a general predicament. The originality, however, lies in the blend of this oblique manner with a highly passionate and dramatic style, which constantly escapes from the regions of wit, irony and sensibility into a dramatic intensity of feeling.”

The Love Song is not a Love song in the traditional sense of the term. It is the embodiment of a mood, a feeling of loneliness and need of companionship. Prufrock is a man of split personality. He suffers from both mental and physical weaknesses. He is old and impotent. But at the sometime he has no power to reach a decision whether he should propose to his sweetheart or not. He is timid and indecisive.

Prufrock represents a split consciousness, a division between heart and head. In fact he has two selves—romantic and realist. His heart is his romantic self and the head is the realist self. His romantic self persuades him to go to his beloved
and propose to her. But his realist self advises him not to hurry. It also fills him with the vital question:

“Do I dare

Disturb the universe?”

Soon his romantic self reminds him of her beauty. But his head clearly suggests that he lacks the necessary courage to speak out his feelings and propose to her. However his romantic self does not loosen its hold upon him. So he again beings to ponder:

“Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways

And how should I presume?”

The poem ends where it began. There is no progress in the love affair of Prufrock. However, there has been a deeper and deeper probing into the consciousness of Prufrock. The poet has succeeded in highlighting the dilemma of an enervated man as
well as the sordidness and pettiness of modern urban civilization.

The Waste Land is considered to be an important piece of English literature for reflecting the decayed condition of the modern civilization. But at the same time this poem has assumed a universal nature and has a timeless quality because through various myths the poet has highlighted the spiritual sterility prevailing in ancient times and then in the medieval period because of the sins of sex and materialistic pursuits. It has proved beyond doubt that a life devoid of spirituality is a death in life and it is the universal phenomenon and not particular to the modern society. Eliot thus seeks to point out that sterile degeneration is inherent in the human situation but there has always been the desire of the people for regeneration. Williamson remarks:

“The people of the Waste Land are not made happy by the return of spring, of fruitfulness to the soil: they prefer the barrenness of winter or the dead season.”6
As *The Waste Land* deals with a universal theme of spiritual emptiness and the unemotional sexuality which have been the characteristics of all the periods of history, it has been called a timeless piece of literature. It is valid for all ages. The poet wants to say that unemotional sex or lust for sex for pleasure is a feature of all the ages. Undoubtedly, Eliot has given a very clear picture of spiritual and cultural chaos of European society after the First World War. The importance of moral and spiritual realization has increased today where our mind is assailed by doubt and despair, disbelief and unbelief. In this regard Dr. Radhakrishnan says:

“Large Sections of the people of the world today are victims of unwilling disbelief. They are not able to stand inside the cloistered walls of the traditional forms yet they require a faith, a frame of reference for their present needs and tasks. Man can not continue for long to live, in a state of disequilibrium or
In this way, Eliot’s poetry has relevance not merely to the modern peculiar human situation but also to the universal human predicament. The poem highlights the egoistic nature of modern man. T.S. Eliot wants to say that modern man has become self-centered. He always thinks of his own interest. He has lost all the touch of fellow feeling. There is no sentiment of sympathy and compassion for the weaker sections of the society in him. The presence of a direct relation between the modern sense of crisis and his poetry is apparent on a superficial analysis. In his poetry and dramas we have a number of major characters who seem to betray the contemporary crisis. But we must be careful to distinguish between a tragic view of life and a superficial sense of disillusionment. Eliot felt that modern life could be interpreted and could gain depth of meaning by being allied to parallel patterns of human behavior embodied in myth and legend. T.S. Eliot seeks the seeds of salvation in Hindu philosophy of Da Da Da.
The first “Da” means “to give”. Eliot asks “what have we to give?” Have we given ourselves away? Are we committed to a certain way to life? What have we contributed for our survival? “Give” does not mean charity or money for the relief of the poor. It means giving oneself to a spiritual way of life or to surrender to a higher purpose. It has been the inspiration for all movements of reform. Great men have given their lives for the cause which they held dear. Men are remembered not for their assets and wealth or by their legacies or wills, or by the references in the newspaper, but what they have contributed to the good of the community as a whole: Such things will not be shown in any obituary note or in the will and testament or in the inscription over the grave.
“Data: What have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment’s surrender

Which an age of prudence can never retract”

The second meaning of the word “Da” is “Dayadhvam” i.e. to sympathies. This is no emotional bond of union between individuals or between the individual and society. We think in terms of self-fulfillment.

“Dayadhvam: I have heard the key.

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison.

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison”

Firstly man is imprisoned in his own ego-cell. No one thinks of the community as a whole. Only at night sometimes in the silence of one’s environment, one’s heart goes out of one’s self and thinks of other fellowmen. At that time one may be
compared to a “broken Coriolanus”. This means that like Coriolanus each one is arrogant and self-centered. When Coriolanus, mother pleads with him not to destroy his own city, he feels sympathy for his fellow-citizens. So, the second remedy for the survival of civilizations is the spirit of brotherhood and fellow-feeling. It has the reference to the story in Dante’s Inferno. Ogling who was in prison, heard the key-turn in the lock. When the prisoners were inside and the door was locked, the key was thrown in the river nearby and the prisoners were left to starve. Key symbolized the release from one’s ego. Cleanthes Brooks remarks:

“The comment on dayadhvam (sympathize) is obviously connected with the foregoing passage. The surrender to something outside the self is an attempt (Whether on the sexual level or some other) to transcend one’s essential isolation. The passage gathers up the symbols previously developed in the poem
just as the fore-going passage reflects, though with a different implication.”¹⁰

The third meaning of “Da” is Dumyat which means “control”. This indicates the necessity for regulating one’s life in such a manner that the natural spirit of adventure and buoyancy is not destroyed. For example, in dance, movement and discipline go together.

“Dumyat: The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar

The sea was calm, your heart would have responded”¹¹

The poet compares this control to the movement of a boat under an expert captain. The boat of life must sail without fear of wind but with the guidance of an expert controlling hand.

The heart should also respond willingly to the body in controlling mechanism within the individual. In other words
there is the need of inner discipline or the voice of conscience to control the feelings and actions of the individual. Naturally, there can be no rule or uniform mechanism of an individual self-regulation. Each person must discover the means of his own inner discipline so that society may not disintegrate.

In the closing lines, Eliot strikes a personal note and wishes to find out remedy for the reform of spiritually decadent society. He has found three remedies which correspond to the three words mentioned above. The poet has given the three remedies to save the modern man from destruction.

“I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down”\(^{12}\)

London Bridge is falling down; European civilization is collapsing. Reconstruction must begin with the individual. One
cannot reform society as a whole. One must begin with one-self. The first remedy suggested is derived from Dante namely self-purification. This means willing acceptance of suffering for self-reform. The second remedy is derived from a Latin lyric. The poet finds the nightingale and the swallow singing with a great joy. What is the secret of their joy? The secret lies in spiritual discipline. The third remedy is derived from a French sonnet. It is the complete detachment from worldly possessions which is the condition for spiritual re-birth. The poet wishes to re-build the world with these three important components. To same, the poet’s idea of a spiritual reconstruction will sound as the shouting of a mad man. He refers to Hieronymus in Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy. The spiritual madness seems to only way of social re-construction and reform. Then only will blessing of heaven come to the suffering humanity like gentle drops of rain, like “Shanty” or place which gives understanding thus the poem ends on a hopeful note. Stephen Spender writes:

“The poem ends not with an affirmation of faith so much as with gestures of
resignation which fall back on Buddhism: the oriental religion of the acceptance of the world as suffering the world in which every-thing is consumed by fire. Christianity - St. Augustine- and the Buddha are brought together only as the teaching of asceticism.”

REFERENCES


8. The Waste Land, 42.


12. The Waste Land, 43.