1.1 Life and Works of T.S. Eliot

Eliot's personal life was quite turbulent. Thomas Stearns Eliot was the youngest of seven siblings. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, was a Washington University graduate and son of a much respected Unitarian minister. At the time of his son's birth, he had risen to the position of Chairman of the Hydraulic Press Brick Company. The city of St. Louis was growing rapidly and the Eliot's brick firm was becoming very successful. Thomas Eliot's mother, Charlotte Champe Eliot, came from an affluent family in Massachusetts. In her spare time, she wrote several books including a biography of her father-in-law. The childhood of Thomas Eliot was especially pampered because he was afflicted with a hernia. His parents’ wealth allowed them to hire an Irish nurse to look after him. His nurse was a catholic; this could have been a reason for his attachment and inclination towards Catholicism from his childhood, which took shape in 1927 along with his conversion into an Anglican. He has already mentioned that his childhood and his second marriage to Valerie was the happiest time of his life that he had always recalled. In 1915, he married an English writer named Vivienne Haigh-Wood. The marriage, unfortunately, was not a happy one. His wife was highly neurotic and constantly sick. This had a profound effect on Eliot, and by November 1921, he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. As the result, he went to recuperate in a Swiss sanatorium on medical advice. After two months, he returned, making a stop in Paris to give Ezra Pound the manuscript for *The Wasteland*. He eventually left his wife in 1933, and she was later committed to a
mental home where she died in 1947. A decade later Eliot married again to his secretary Valerie, once again ‘V’ after Vivienne, and was happy for the remaining eight years of his life.

T.S. Eliot is of incomparable significance and a vast source of inspiration and enlightenment for the readers who are interested in the variety of mysteries and profundity of human existence. For this purpose, his works will never be outdated and his inner grasp of the kaleidoscopic patterns of lives in all spheres can be considered as a great source of enlightenment for modern men’s crisis ridden insight. The age of T.S. Eliot was ridden with religious crisis and being a Christian, he was deeply influenced by the Biblical stories, incidents, myths, its teachings, biblical symbolism, imagery from the very time he adopted Catholicism. As mentioned earlier he adopted catholic Christianity in 1927 and his compositions got colored in the Biblical units. It is this firm conviction about his Christian conscience that drove us to undertake a critical study of his works with a special emphasis on the religious dimensions showing the impact of the holy Bible and the Sunday masses.

As we have found, it is the lent and the advent season in Christianity, which formulates a major part of his poetry. Besides liturgy and the Bible, the impact of Indian philosophy, the holy Gita, Vedas and Upanishads and Buddhism as well is predictable in his works.

Such a great American-born English poet, playwright, and literary critic Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri on September 26, 1888 and died on
January 4, 1965. He was arguably the most important English-language poet of the 20th century. His first publication, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, is regarded as a masterpiece of the modernist movement, which was followed by some of the best-known poems in English language, including *Gerontion* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also remembered as a great source of enlightenment in the light of religion for his seven plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Rock*-a pageant play (1934) was his sole effort for building church for which his sacred feelings can never be denied. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Order of Merit in 1948. Eliot was educated at Harvard University. He entered Harvard in 1906, and was influenced by Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, anti-Romanticism, Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, the Italian Renaissance, and Indian mystical philosophy. He studied the philosophical works of English Idealist F. H. Bradley, and eventually did his Harvard dissertation on him. T. S. Eliot later studied philosophy and literature in Germany and France. After the outbreak of World War I in 1914, T. S. Eliot went to England where he studied Greek philosophy at Oxford, taught in a school at London, and later worked for Lloyd's Bank.

Eliot started writing literary and philosophical review shortly after this. He wrote for the *Athenaeum* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and was assistant editor for the *Egoist* from 1917-1919. In 1922, he founded the successful quarterly *Criterion*, which he edited until 1939. His poetry was first published in 1915, when *The Love Song Of
*J. Alfred Prufrock* was his first poetry which got published in *Poetry* magazine. His first collection was published in 1917 as *Prufrock and Other Observations*. A couple of other smaller collections appeared in 1919 and 1920, then in 1922 *The Waste Land* was published first in the *Criterion*, then in the *Dial*, and finally in book form. In 1925, he published *Poems 1909-25*. At the same time, he was publishing his critical essays and had got several published between 1920 and 1932. In 1925, he became a director of the London publishing firm Faber and Faber, formerly known as Faber and Gwyer. In 1927, he became a British subject and joined the Church of England.

After graduating in 1909, he studied philosophy at the University of Paris for a year and won a scholarship to Merton College, Oxford in 1914, becoming a British citizen when he was 39. Barry Spur’s eagerly awaited, definitive study of T.S. Eliot’s Anglo-Catholic belief and practice shows how the poet’s religion shaped his life and work for almost forty years, until his death in 1965.

Incorporating significant new material from correspondence and diaries, which sheds light on Eliot’s thought, the author examines the poet's formal adoption of Anglo-Catholicism, in 1927, as the culmination of his intellectual, cultural, artistic, spiritual and personal development to that point. Through an informed presentation and discussion of Anglo-Catholicism at the time of Eliot’s conversion and through subsequent decades, Spurr presents the first detailed analysis of the unique influence that Anglo-Catholicism’s principles and social teaching had on Eliot’s poetry, plays, prose and personal life.
Works of T.S. Eliot at a Glance


**Plays:** Sweeney Agonistes (published in 1926, first performed in 1934), The Rock (1934), Murder in the Cathedral (1935), The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1949), The Confidential Clerk (1953), The Elder Statesman (first performed in 1958, published in 1959)

**Nonfiction:** Christianity & Culture (1939, 1948), The Second-Order Mind (1920), Tradition and the Individual Talent (1920), The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920), Homage to John Dryden (1924), Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca (1928), For Lancelot Andrews (1928), Dante (1929)

**Essays:** The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), After Strange Gods (1934), Elizabethan Essays (1934), Essays Ancient and Modern (1936), The Idea of a Christian Society (1940), A Choice of Kipling's Verse (1941) made by Eliot, with an


1.2

Awards and Achievements

1. Order of Merit (awarded by king George VI, UK, 1948)

2. Nobel prize for Literature “for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry” (Stockholm, 1948)

3. Officier de la Legion d’Honneur 1951

4. Hanseatic Goethe Prize (Hamburg, 1955)

5. Dante Medal (Florence, 1959)

6. Commandeur de l’ordre des Arts et des Lettres, 1960

7. Presidential Medal of Freedom, 1964

8. 13 honorary doctorates (including Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne and Harvard)

9. Tony Award in 1950 for Best Play: The Broadway production of The Cocktail Party

10. Two posthumous Tony Awards (1983) for his poems used in the musical Cats

11. Eliot College of the University of Kent, England, named after him
12. Celebrated on commemorative postage stamps

13. Has a star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame

1.3

Gridiron of the Research

Our investigation is based upon all the spheres of his works, which includes his poetry, drama and the prose. However, the study is dealing with some of his specific works in the above-mentioned spheres of his literature. It is in this context that the relevance of T.S. Eliot’s writings under the Biblical impact becomes more and more clear. Eliot who had an acute modern sensibility was more modern and more civilized than most of his contemporaries but his true perception of modernity helped him to warn the society of evils of unrestricted modernism and irrelevant and the subservient faith in the new ways of life, which were thriving without regard for the vital and the living past. For this reason, he tried to show the way towards God advocating through the holy Bible. This is what we have tried to unravel in the study.

A man with a profound and complex attitude toward life, Eliot engaged the modern world and entered into dialogue with its intellectuals in numerous fields, writing with a comprehensive range on poetry, fiction, drama, literary criticism, humanism, religion, cultural and economic theory, education, world politics and other topics of intellectual importance. Indian influences, both Hindu and Buddhist, are scattered everywhere in the works of T. S. Eliot. For instance, the three “shanties” which mean the peace blessings provide *The Wasteland* a long poem of 1920 the
status of an *Upanishad*, as in the Indian tradition only *Upanishads* are given the triple benedictions at the end. While acknowledging the *Brihadaranyaka–Upanishad*, Eliot changes the advice of Prajapati to the three kinds of intelligent forms who came to him as disciples: gods, anti-gods, and man. In the ancient Sanskrit, the final advice to the gods is given by Prajapati which is to be disciplined, to control themselves, because gods tend be victims of arrogance; the anti-gods are advised to be compassionate, because they tend to be brutal and vicious; and the men are advised to be giving, because they tend to become victims of selfishness.

On the other hand, the references such that of the Holy Grail and the myth of king Fisher in *The Wasteland* reflects the Christian mythology. In the *Cocktail Party* Celia Coplestone exhibit the Christian martyrdom as the result of the sin of adultery and works towards the Nirvana, the Buddhist philosophy is then reflected in the end of this morality play. Martyrdom of Becket along with the sermon he delivered which is the sermon delivered on the eve of Christmas and some of the verses included in *Ash Wednesday* and *Journey of the Magi* are drawn from the Anglican liturgy, again showing Eliot’s inclination towards Christian element drawn from the holy Bible and the Liturgy. His prose such as *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *Notes Towards Tradition and Culture* and *Religion and Literature* too gave the message to his readers on the behaviour of a true Christian. Eliot was always trying to make his readers seek the almighty by laying down the code of conduct for them through his poetry, drama and essays. To fulfill his divine purpose he took allusions from the Hindu Philosophy, The Buddhist Philosophy and Patanjali along with the Christian liturgy and the Holy Bible, as he was a devoted
Christian and a great scholar who studied Sanskrit and eastern philosophy for his college degrees. As Leavis said: Eliot’s poetry commits the crisis of modern philosophy, tries to get back the traditional life view for the modern people, and constructs an idealistic and artistic social order for them, which is just as what Leavis says—“The origins of the dominant Anglo-American traditions of criticism in the mid-twentieth are of course complex…. And philosophy and religion would be replaced by poetry in modern society…and the single most influential common figure was the American poet, dramatist and critic T. S. Eliot.¹ Since the beginning, literature had been a medium of critical support for such Judeo-Christian religious doctrines as creation, covenant, exile, incarnation and redemption, and a source of relative stability for various moral and social orders based on their premises.

Eliot argued that this association between religion, literature and society had happened when society was moderately healthy and its various discourses in some relation with one another were not always perfectly harmonious. So literature had been either a monolithic reflection or a mode of subversion of society and religion, as each discourse sets up its own creative and prophetic energies over and against the others for a totalizing hegemony on its own terms.² Gardener said, “I arrived at the criterion that a religious poem was a poem concerned in some way with revelation and with man's response to it.”³ The fact that certain poems of Eliot have been included in the Faber Book of Religious Verse suggests that, at least, Gardner regards them as 'religious poems'. However, where Gardner feels the necessity to create criteria by which to recognize religious literature, Eliot questions the validity of the
concept of 'religious literature' as a distinct body of works, suggesting that all literature is to some extent religious: I am convinced that we fail to realize how completely, and yet how irrationally, we separate our literary from our religious judgments. If there could be a complete separation, perhaps it might not matter: but the separation is not, and never can be, complete.  

Although Eliot speaks of religion in general, his personal focus is on Christianity; he explicitly states his desire for "a literature which should be unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian" (FK). In the context of a parallel desire for a world which is in itself Christian, the idea that all literature is somehow connected with religion assumes that the basis for religion is something which transcends the individual mind; and from the Christian point of view, of course, this is emphatically so. As far as Christianity is concerned, there is only one true religion; therefore, the world is 'Christian', created by the Christian God, even if it does not realize this. The existence of this viewpoint must at least be acknowledged in order to fully understand Eliot's view of all literature as being 'religious'.

Ideas of religion are always contentious, and ideas of revelation are often more so, even within the context of a religion. Christians believe that the revelation of God to humankind in His incarnation on earth was for all mankind and for all time; so all literature must on one level be "concerned with revelation and man's response to it": it must constitute some kind of response, even if neither positive nor conscious, to that revelation. However, we must remember here that all Gods in Hindu philosophy are also the incarned humans who came to balance the evil and the good. Eliot's
conversion was no "Road to Damascus" experience, that 'revelation' would be a gradual process mirrored in the body of his poetry as a whole. This has been suggested by B. Rajan, who asserts that Eliot's poetry is an advance, an inch-by-inch movement up the stairway in which the end is significant because it both remembers and fulfils the beginning.  

This sense of memory and fulfillment supports the idea of a gradual revelation, realized over a period of time; it also suggests a structure to Eliot's poetic hand which is almost Biblical, reflecting the way in which the Old Testament prophecies look forward to the New Testament and the coming of Christ, are fulfilled in him, and are remembered by him as he uses their language in direct quotations, adapted quotations, and a subtle but complex framework of allusions. The parallels with Eliot's poetry are immediately apparent. If this "advance" occurs in the macrocosm of the body of Eliot's poetry, it also occurs in the microcosm of a single poem; the image of the "stairway" immediately calls to mind Ash Wednesday, which mimetically reproduces the struggle of the sinner through repentance and purgation and self-realization. The poet strives towards both the desired redemption and the finished poem: redemption by the Word within the word. The poetic act itself, the ascent of the stair, represents Eliot working out his own salvation in fear and trembling as he portrays this in almost all the leading characters of his plays, be it Gerontion, Harry, Celia or Becket. Religion and poetry, spiritual and poetic development, seem here to be inseparably tangled. The idea of this dual advancement and improvement is reflected in the opinions of those critics who would describe Four Quartets as Eliot's greatest work, a
literary and spiritual triumph; Watkins, however, argues that- After Eliot turned to Anglo-Catholicism in 1928, his poetic power began to wane. Because the subject of his later poetry treats a great and noble religious faith, a believer wishes to regard it as great and noble poetry. Moreover, presumably genuine Waste Landers would like to find in the later poetry not only art but also the end of the search for grounds for belief. 6

Toien offers a different view again of interlinked poetic and spiritual development; he sees Eliot's poetry as a progression "from the barren aimlessness" of *The Waste Land* to the highly directed, intensely focused Christian mysticism of his last major work, *Four Quartets*. 7 This apparent "barren aimlessness" seems incompatible with revelation or a meaningful response to it; yet *The Waste Land* displays intense spirituality, and could even be described as "religious" according to Gardner's criterion. More "barren aimlessness" can be seen in Eliot's pre-*Waste Land* poetry, although even *Prufrock* expresses a momentary desire to be an instrument of revelation as he contemplates Lazarus and John the Baptist. Most obviously concerned with the Christian revelation, however, is "Gerontion", whose speaker reflects on the confusion and doubt which attends man's desire for revelation: The respective voices of poet and Pharisees express a longing for revelation, a desire to "see a sign", but when the sign comes it is "Swaddled with darkness"; Gerontion seems to blame the silent word and the darkness for his incomprehension, but the Bible verses to which Eliot may be alluding when he speaks of "signs" and "wonders" rather imply that the hearer is at fault. Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest
heed to the things which we have heard... How shall we escape, if we neglect so
great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed
unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and
wonders, and with divers miracles.  

Whatever may be the arguments about Eliot, no one can deny the Christian Of his
early works. Eliot has said, “The form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was
directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama;
and I do not know anyone who started from exactly that point.” Elsewhere he said:
“The kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist
in English at all; it was only found in French,” and Leonard Unger concludes that,
“insofar as Eliot started from an exact point, it was exclusively and emphatically the
poetry of Laforgue.” To a lesser extent, other Symbolists, the metaphysical poets,
Donne, Dryden, and Dante influenced him. “His appreciation of Shakespeare,” writes
Sir Herbert Read “was subject to his moral or religious scruples.” With Samuel
Johnson, whom, according to Sir Herbert, Eliot “honored above all other English
writers,” he shared “a faith in God and the fear of death.” God, birth, death, sin and
suffering, expiation of sins, salvation, martyrdom, redemption, revelation, and
temptation cannot be in the Christian domain they are found in every religion and
philosophy. When we discuss about Eliot we must interpret his work in both concerns
that is the eastern and the western philosophy as he was a master of both and his work
contain allusions from both fields. With all these statements of Eliot himself and the
other renowned authors of the English Literature, it is very clear that Eliot was having
a faith in god and the fear of death and he wrote to preach spirituality and religion taking references from the east and the west. We can no doubt conclude that he was inclined towards the mystery of life and death and the sole purpose of human life on earth for that reason may be he studied eastern philosophy at the young age trying to explore the human and the divine. Evolutional philosophy is applied to the study of literature as to everything else. It has shown that every great work of genius must depend on previous authors and the religion and philosophy contained in the available literature. Beautiful work of art comes out of traditional and individual influences. In addition, in case of Eliot it was religion and Philosophy too.

Our aim is to explore the works of Tom with special reference to the Biblical Allusions and the Liturgical Usage in it. However, it cannot be denied that he was highly influenced by the Bhagavad-Gita as he studied eastern philosophy during his Harvard years. He even wrote his thesis on philosophy however, he had never gone to get his doctor’s degree from there. The following main influences can be found on him:-

1. French symbolists such as Mallarme, La Forgue, Baudelaire, Corbeere etc.
2. Imagists T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound
3. Oriental Philosophy of the Gita, the Upanishads, the Buddhist Philosophy
4. Dante
5. The Metaphysical Poets and John Donne
6. Contemporary English Life Style
7. Contemporary religious crisis amongst the civilization

8. Marital Life with Vivienne Haigh Wood

He drew his intellectual provisions from Dante, Shakespeare, the Bible, St. John of Cross and other Christian mystics, the Greek Dramatists, Baudelaire and the Bhagavad-Gita. The Wasteland, Four Quartets, Ash Wednesday, Murder in the Cathedral all show influences of Indian philosophy and mysticism on him. Eliot was a twenty-three years’ old student at Harvard when he first came across Indian philosophy and religion. What sparked his interest in the Vedic thought is not recorded but soon he was occupied with Sanskrit, Pali and the metaphysics of Patanjali. He also read the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads as is apparent from the concluding lines of the Wasteland. The Wasteland ends with the reiteration of the three cardinal virtues from the second Brahmana passage in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: damayata-restraint, datta-charity, dayadhvam-compassion and the state of mind that follows obedience to the commands is indicated by blessing Shantih Shantih, that Eliot himself roughly translated as “the peace that passeth understanding”. The Bhagavad made a more stable impression on Eliot. It is seen relevant not only to the Wasteland but to the Four Quartets, The Dry Salvages and the Family Reunion. The forbearance taught by the Bhagavad-Gita is highlighted in Eliot’s use of imagery drawn from several religions. As professor, Philip R. Headings has remarked in his study of the poet, “No serious student of Eliot’s poetry can afford to ignore his early and continued interest in the Bhagavad-Gita. In sagacity, Eliot follows in the massive route of Emerson and Thoreau and the early transcendentalists.
There is a keener insight into what endure and should endure and incessant demand that all traditions of literature, music, painting, architecture and philosophy be put to there proper psychic or religious applications. In this way, Eliot’s message is the message of the Gita, of the essential utility of all activity: a message for all era but it must be united with the resources, tenor and the viewpoint of his poems. Besides this when we see the holy Grail legend, King Fisher myth in the Wasteland we find Eliot demonstrating their sins and teaching men the importance of maintaining purity at body and soul. When he tells men to turn towards God he works to remove hesitation in men with spiritual crisis and motivates them to ask God for mercy as the God is ever ready to forgive, here he sounds like a catholic priest conducting Lenten Ash Wednesday mass service incorporating the prayers of catholic liturgy and Ash Wednesday’s message teaching men to turn towards God asking for forgiveness.

It is an attempt of ours to locate the similarities between the two great epics The Bible and the Bhagavad-Gita of Christian and Hindu religion and to compare their existence in Thomas Stearns Eliot’s literature.
Chapter 1
References


