CONCLUSION

We have titled this thesis as "T S Eliot's 'Strange Gods' : The Problem of Belief". It is not as if it were that the 'gods' identified by Eliot were his 'strange gods' because in that case there would not have arisen any question of discussion. What we have said in Chapter 2 about the identity of these gods should have cleared any misgivings about our intentions. They are called T S Eliot's 'Strange gods' because that is what Eliot chose to call them. Implied in the adjective, 'strange', used to qualify the noun, 'gods', is the fact that Eliot has grave reservations about their worship. And for the simple reason, too, that the practice goes contrary to all beliefs and traditions. They are 'strange' gods because they are the products of wrong beliefs.

If it is true, as it indeed is, that the 'quality of thought' embedded in the 'dark embryo', referred to in Chapter 3, modifies the 'quality of feeling', then it should be equally true that the 'inner unity' of both the thought and feeling regulates the 'outer unity' reflected in the expression of that thought and feeling. Our concern with belief is not as important in case of 'dissociated' sensibility as it is in case of 'unified' sensibility which has been...
Eliot's concern throughout his discourses on poetry. His apparent disapproval of artistic pieces which play upon feelings by taking up ideas merely for the emotional values attached to them is quite clear. He seems to hold that artists, who concerned themselves with the truth of ideas, born out of their convictions, were practitioners of art in the real sense of the term because feelings were for them merely the 'by-product' of the creative process. Not the end in themselves.

We have already talked about the neat classification of beliefs into the intellectual and the emotional categories. The task of the artist - whether he or she be a poet, a playwright, a novelist or a short story writer, or even a critic - is to ensure that his or her work presents a consistent 'point of view' which is by its very nature quite artistic in its composition. A belief, which is only 'held' but not 'felt', when expressed by an artist, makes the work smack of what Eliot calls a 'pious insincerity'. This would seem to suggest that an artistic piece ought to be founded on a belief that is 'felt'. The reason, of course, is that the sense of power that one 'feels' to be attached with the sense of knowledge is what accounts for the highest and the best of the pleasures. One's knowledge of something is founded on a true belief or what is called Belief proper. It needs to be noted that the evidence supporting a belief,
if it is sufficient enough for its confirmation, increases our pleasure. In order to re-acquaint ourselves with what 'belief' means, we would like to quote from K Clifford's essay on "The Ethicks of Belief":

Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours not for ourselves, but for humanity. It is rightly used on truths which have been established by long experience and waiting toil, and which have stood in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning. Then it helps to bind men together, and to strengthen and direct their common action.

'Belief' is called a 'sacred' faculty and sacred is an adjective that has at least two meanings: (1) something dedicated to god or religious purpose, and (2) something that escapes critical examination. 'Faculty' is an ability or aptitude for something, or any of the powers of the mind or body.

Together, as a phrase, 'sacred faculty' might refer to any of the powers of the mind or body gifted by god and dedicated to a religious purpose. The powers of the mind
are very clearly related to thought much in the same way as the powers of the body are related to feeling. 'Belief' is a 'sacred faculty' in that it is an ability or aptitude for working toward a reconciliation of thought and feeling. And this reconciliation has, as its ultimate aim, the celebration of the divine. Clifford finds this faculty to be the one that prompts the decisions of our will. But, at the same time, he also sees it as the thread that helps knit 'all the compacted energies of our being' into a harmonious whole. The compacted energies of our being are, of course, our senses and the oneness of our soul with those of the others. That is the first prerequisite and such a unity is never individualistic but collective in that it is for the whole of the humanity. A similar message comes through quite distinctly from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

The ending of Eliot's essay, "A Note on Poetry and Belief", written in 1927, makes very interesting reading. He says:

We await, in fact |...| the great genius Who shall triumphantly succeed in believing something. For those of us who are higher than the mob, and lower than the man of inspiration, there is always doubt, and in doubt we are living parasitically (which is better than not
living at all) on the minds of men of
genius of the past who have believed
something.⁴ (Eliot's emphases)

One should like to think that Eliot found the whole situation quite disparaging. Note the stress on 'those of us' who are 'higher than the mob' and 'lower than the man of inspiration'. By and large, these are the people who are always in doubt and, hence, in perpetual damnation. If these are people 'higher than the mob', then they constitute the elite class but if these are people 'lower than the man of inspiration', they lack the creativity of the Romantic tradition. These are two extreme ends, quite apparently. And the whole point is that somewhere between the elite and the man of inspiration is the line demarcating the merger of the intellect and emotion, born out of intuition. Since the beliefs of this class are plagued with doubts, their existence has no meaning within the context of a tradition. More so, because they are highly individualistic.

T S Eliot uses different words to talk about belief: doctrine, theory, or 'view of life'.⁵ It may be possible to think of belief as springing from a doctrine or a theory, or even a view of life but what may not be possible is to talk of belief without any conviction in 'a certain view of life'. He notes that

... if you yourself are convinced of a certain view of life, then you irresistibly and
inevitably believe that if anyone else comes to 'understand' it fully, his understanding must terminate in belief. It is possible, and sometimes necessary, to argue that full understanding must identify itself with full belief.\(^6\) (Eliot's emphasis)

One would not miss the connection between conviction and understanding. We can only be convinced about what we have understood, comprehended and this understanding or comprehension is the precursor of belief. Hence, Eliot's argument that 'full understanding must identify with full belief'. Implied here is the fact that there is some identification between 'understanding' and 'belief'. For, a reader's convictions affect his or her responses, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" introduces a discourse on the theory of belief by focussing on the relation of poetry to thought. Thought is seen as a sense-experience in itself and this is digested in the sensibility\(^7\) and poetry is, in Eliot's philosophy, 'a comprehensive and coherent articulation of sensibility' — a sensibility that is unified in nature. Moody notes that poetry, for Eliot, is 'metaphysics', or 'it aspires toward metaphysics'.\(^8\)

We will return to how Eliot conceives of that particular relation between poetry and belief. The first of these lies in 'the poetic use of philosophical ideas'. Secondly, there is 'the emotional rendering of the poet's philosophy
which... appears as a fusion between the philosophy and his natural feelings.' Lastly, 'the poetic illustration of a philosophy which is already existent and moreover generally accepted.' The philosophy in Eliot, as we have noted earlier, is the Christian philosophy. And this philosophy shapes the belief which goes beyond experience. The 'memory' that is believed to be trust-worthy, shaped as it is by experience, if it is used as a guide to action, subsumes that whatever has happened was in the nature of what might have happened and what is likely to happen. Thus, it will be consistent with the supposition of what might have happened, but this clearly goes beyond experience. We may thus believe in what goes beyond experience only if it is inferred from that experience. Such a belief can be based on the assumption that what we do not know is like what we know. And, Eliot does voice this through Archbishop Thomas Becket in Murder in the Cathedral and the resonance of what he says by the Fourth Tempter towards the end of Act I. The Fourth Tempter replaces the pronoun 'they' with the pronoun 'you'. Here we have Archbishop Becket talking of the chorus consisting of the women of Canterbury:

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer./ They know and do not know, that action is suffering/And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer/Nor the patient act. But
both are fixed/in an eternal action,
an eternal patience....

Obviously, there is the juxtaposition of appearance and reality. On the plane of appearance, action and suffering are distinct, but on the plane of reality, they coincide at the still point of the wheel. Such a point of view is to be found even in Jones' exposition on Murder in the Cathedral. The key word here seems to be 'to know'.

The verb 'to know' has several meanings and one should like to think that Eliot, with his flair for language, is quite conscious in his use of it. And it is fact that Eliot bemoaned the loss of knowledge 'We have lost in information'. If we keep this at the back of our mind and take a fresh look at the verb 'to know', it would not be far-fetched to assume that in toying with the verb, Eliot ranged the accumulation of facts against 'awareness' or even perception, on the one hand, and the ability to recognize two things as being distinct, on the other. Now, if the women of Canterbury 'know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer', then it appears to be safe to conclude that he has in mind the idea that they had facts but found it difficult to make any headway. The distinction, or even the awareness of the distinction, is absent. They realize that something is amiss but cannot comprehend the likely shape of things to come. And, thus they can only 'fear' for the Archbishop's safety. The Archbishop is secure in his knowledge
that he need have no fear if the shape of things are the
design of God who has willed them. Clearly then, the 'fears'
of the Chorus are born out of their inability to apprehend
reality while Becket's resignation to the Will of God, and
his acceptance of it as his destiny, is a result of his
awareness and understanding of the mysterious ways in which
God moves. Therefore, it is the result of his belief to
which his soul consents. What this seems to suggest is
that the mystery reaffirmed through myth unifies dialecti­
cally with religion that celebrates it and history that has
recorded it.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Eliot
resorting to the use of myth, religion and history because
all these are a part of tradition. Marius Bewley notes that
the meaning and structure of Eliot's plays have "a dialec­
tical unity comprising myth, religion and history." Eliot's
repeated reference to the 'timeless' has been the subject
of discussion elsewhere in this work. And 'timelessness,
being altogether outside time, is a characteristic feature
of the Platonic Ideas'. These are unchangeable as
'eternal' prototypes; God being one of the many such ideas.
Also, God is a mystery as much as the dual nature of Christ
or the idea of Incarnation. A mystery, in theological terms,
is any religious truth revealed divinely and accepted on
faith. Similarly, it is something unexplained (or, maybe,
even unexplainable) like a myth, which also includes our
customs, religious rites (these are a part of 'tradition'). It is to be noted that 'the myth is the link between religious experience and past events' which 'has been apprehended consciously or subconsciously, as deeply significant for the spiritual self.'

Ullman (1959: 68) notes how 'myth', in its original sense, means 'word, speech, narration' and these are a part of Eliot's theory of tradition. He goes on to say that 'it narrates religious insights which cannot be reported in straightforward language' necessitating the bringing together of 'the facts' and 'their deeper meaning' in 'one symbol, the myth'. Myth is thus seen as 'the natural link between history and inner experience.' And moreover, since myths are always present in every act of faith, the symbol becomes the language of faith. Ronald Bush (1984: 124) reiterates how Eliot elaborated upon the fact that 'it is the destiny of all the words in a poem to approach the status of symbols — a status which has a counterpart in religious tradition'. In symbolism 'to which the word tends both in religion and poetry', Eliot found 'the incarnation of meaning in fact'. Eliot's admiration for the French symbolists is the likely reason for this. The symbol that myth is effective in communicating religious insights without changing them into theory or dogma.
To sum up, then, Eliot's quest for belief begins with his quest for order and the reaffirmation of faith as a correlate of the creative process. Hence, the insistence on tradition. A personal point of view highlights a second-hand sentiment. Only the 'impersonal ideas' seem to obscure "what we really are and really feel, what we really want, and what really excites our interests". Let us put his poetics in its totality, thus:

**The Miracle of Life**

Life is a never-ending miracle
Of the continuous resurrection
Of man God. In birth is death,
and in death, birth reaffirmed
through the Incarnate Thought
Every moment is this Divine
Miracle of Incarnation repeated
and strengthened. The moment of surrender is also the perfection of will, the unity of Man and God.

The Last Supper renews the
Covenant between God and His creation. Man's baptism by water begins at the intersection of the time and the timeless, where his divines birth and death. The truth of impersonality lies in the perfection
of will and the points of reference always correlate the object with the Incarnate Thought.

Love and hate, meeting and separation, are the correlates of birth and death reaffirmed through the promised reunion. The pain in the moments of surrenders is in truth the ecstasy of the merged wills. The truth, being overshadowed by the spectre of temptation, revives the question of the forsaking of Man by God, for Man is but a bundle of confusion.

The pain generated in time is the ecstasy out of time, for it is out of time that the decision is made to make perfect the will. The impulses of pain in Love are but the negation of this perfection sought. Shying away from emotion is Man's way of denying the Self. The Self is what we are: rejuvenated, vibrating, pulsating with life.
Love is Life and Life, Love, is the truth of Man's existence, for the renewal of the covenant moves on two planes: the covenant with the Self being the most difficult. Equally impossible is the reaffirmation of the covenant between God and Man, Wrecked in the primaeval negation. Suffering, born of this distancing is the only reason for Man's resurrection.

(J H Khan)
References and Notes:


8. Ibid., p.75.


10. Ibid., p. 64.


15. Please see the article on the subject in *The Southern Review*, October 1965, pp. 906-925.


17. David Guralnik (ed), *WNWD*, p. 496.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid. (For instance, the crucifixion of Christ symbolised through a 'Cross').


