



INFLUENCE OF SANSKRIT IN T.S. ELIOTS - WASTELAND

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Abstract

Indian influences are scattered everywhere in the work of the British poet, critic, dramatist T.S. Eliot. Eliot's interest in Indian thought came large though the influence of his teachers at Howard. The most important influence in Eliot's Howard days seems to have been Irving Babbitt whose thoughts were based upon the study of Pali manuscript. The most important influence in Eliot's Harvard days seems to have been Irving Babbitt whose "system of thought was based upon the study of the Pali manuscripts, the earliest authentic Buddhist documents." Eliot later commented that in Babbitt he found not merely a tutor, "but a man who directed my interests, at a particular moment, in such a way that the marks of that direction are still evident." After studying for one year in Paris which was a centre of Sanskrit studies Eliot back at Howard in Sept 1911, studied ancient Hindu literature and scriptures for two year under the guidance of Charles Layman and also applied himself to the reading of Patanjali, Yoga Suthas under James Wood. A reading of T.S. Eliot's poetry reflects the contribution and influence of the ideas and wisdom of ancient India. In his poetry references may be found to the Vedas, the Upanishad, the Bhagwat Gita, Patanjali Yoga Suthas and Buddhist literature.

Key words: reflection, wisdom, influence.

Introduction

I will present one of the most famous examples of Indian thought and Sanskrit language in Eliot's poetry as it is found in the wasteland. Eliot has used six foreign language and thirty five authors in the wasteland. It is an established fact that the early absorption in philosophy was very important for his development as a poet.

T.S. Eliot began his career by training as a professional philosopher rather than as a poet but his creative imagination perceived the limitations of philosophy. He did not find the academic study of philosophy satisfying because a philosophical system implied the maintenance of a single, more or less consistent point of view and was necessarily based upon the presupposition of the author. Eliot's early philosophical work in fact provides a rich source for mapping the development of his major literary intellectual and religious pre-occupations. As is known, Eliot pursued philosophical questions throughout his career. Though he renounced philosophy for poetry, he insightfully attacked these questions in criticism, social theory and poetry. The relationship of philosophy and poetry, and consequently thought and feeling, remained one of his lifelong concerns Eliot had deep interest in philosophy. Eliot's study of philosophy played a very significant role in the formation of his sensibility. Manju jain points out: Eliot chose to give up the prospect of an academic career in philosophy for poetry, preferring to remain as a man of letters in England rather than return to America to become a professor of philosophy. Eliot renounced philosophy for poetry although his philosophical interests were never wholly divorced from his literary concerns and creative endeavours.

The wasteland exhibits a sterile world of spiritual and moral degeneration, in which one does not know how to make the spirits work. The land in the poem is Christian but the Indian thought work as an infusion of regenerative waters. The poem beings on the banks of 'Thames' and ends on the banks of river 'Ganga'.

The wasteland shows ample influence of the Rig Veda. The poem opens with a description of Nature, the allusions to Indian rituals. are the whole foundation to the poem. Water occupies an important place in the wasteland. The allusion to water in the section 'Death by Water' has over tones of the Hymns of the Rig Veda.

Eliot was so greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy that he decided to entitle the third section of the wasteland as 'The Fire Sermon'. It is after the fire sermon of Lord Buddha. In his Sermon Lord Buddha peaches "all things are on fire", the eye is on fire, forms are in fire, eye consciousness is on fire, the impressions received by

the eye are on the fire and whatever sensation originated in the impressions received by the eye is likewise on fire.

Motif of life in death/death in life is against influenced by the Eastern philosophy – The first line of the poem which asserts ‘April is the cruelest month’ serves as a reminder that is wasteland what is dead, does not always stays dead. Illustrations of life in death are reminders of the concept of Maya or the ultimate reality of what we consider life. Maya describes the veil of illusion that leads people to believe that the world is made up of things separate and distinct and blinds them to the reality that life is in fact a unfired whole Indian philosophy teacher that it is the ignorance of this unity which is the root of all human misery and suffering illustrations of the other aspect of this motif, life in death, can also serve as reminder of Hindu philosophy the concept of reincarnation.

The fifth section of the poem ‘What the thunder said’ is taken from the ‘Thunder’ passage is Brihadaranyaka. Upanishad, Eliots concern here is clearly vedic. What the Thunder said the most complex of all the five sections projects Eliots vision of the human condition and the predicament of man in the contemporary world. It also aims at a solution on Vedic principles. The journey of the protagonist from part first to part fifth. shows that the solution is erodent in the philosophical restraint of the East.

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered for distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder

DA

Datta-----

DA

Dayadhyam-----

DA

Damyata

The arrival of the thunder justifies the title of the section. The thundering sound Da is used thrice in the section, abbreviating the three Sanskrit sutras – Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata, Eliot refer the readers to the fable of the Thunder in the Brihadarayaka Upanishad . The three fold offspring of the creator Prajapati-Gods, Men and Demons approach Prajapati for instructions after completing then formal education. To each group he utter the syllable ‘Da’. Each group interprets this reply differently. The Gods interpret it as Dayadhvam – Control yourself, the men interpret it at ‘datta’ – to give, the demons interpret it as dayadhvam – be compassionate. When the groups, in turn, give their interpretations, Prajapati responds with ‘Om’ signifying that they have fully understood. One should practice the same triad self-control, giving and compassion. The concluding line Shantih, Shantih, Shantih of the wasteland is in consonance with the tile of the last section. It makes Eliot Vedic reference more explicit. Eliots wants the world to know that, that the chanting of Shantih, Shantih is both neutral as well as religious activity in the vedic way of being. The words are not automatic but Eliot wants the universe to be at peace, including the peace for the wastelands. p

Eliot's intellectual journey took him down various paths, most notably through Indian thought, the philosophy of F. H. Bradley and finally into Christianity. Ash Wednesday in the fifth section clearly states the poet's ultimate resolution to the enigma of life in the reality of the Word: "Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled about the centre of the silent Word." Eliot was truly a modern man in search forming, a complex man who experienced afresh the reality of traditional faith and who expressed that faith in terms, symbols and images in his poetry such that other moderns equally complex can also experience the same. Eliot was, beyond doubt an integral poet who was searching for a form of poetry as well as a form of life universality transcends the limitations of time, space and region, caste, colour, and greed. He was an American by birth, a British by profession, a European by culture and tradition and an internationalist by philosophical outlook upon life.

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