

The Hindu Influence on T. S Eliot

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Abstract: T.S. Eliot one of the most influential poets and critics of the twentieth century, was deeply shaped by his encounter with Hindu philosophy and religious thought. During his studies at Harvard and later exposure to indic texts, Eliot engaged with the Bhagavad Gita the Upanishads and key concepts of Hindu metaphysics. These influences are evident in works such as the Waste Land (1922) and Four Quartets (1943) where he employs Sanskrit terms cyclical notions of time and spiritual ideals of renunciation and detachment Eliot's use of the closing Sanskrit invocation "Shantin Shantin Shantin". in the Waste Land reflects his search for transcendence beyond western modernity. Rather than a superficial borrowing his engagement reveals a genuine intellectual and spiritual grappling with Hindu thought which provided him with new ways to confront themes of despair, fragmentation and redemption in the modern age.

This paper explores the depth of Hindu influence on Eliot's poetry showing how eastern philosophy to the universality of his literary achievement.

Key words: T.S. Eliot, Modernist poetry, Hindu philosophy. Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Eastern influence

I. Introduction:

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) is regarded as one of the most significant poets and critics of the twentieth century. whose works shaped the course of modernist literature. Known for his intellectual depth and spiritual quest, Eliot did not restrict himself to the cultural and religious traditions of the west; rather, he sought wisdom from diverse sources including eastern philosophy. His studies in philosophy at Harvard exposed him to Sanskrit literature and the Hindu scriptures. This paper investigates how Hindu philosophy shaped his poetic vision and philosophical outlook.

The aim of this thesis is to trace in brief the influence of Indian thought on T. S. Eliot. I have not made an attempt to give a thorough and detailed account of various aspects of the influence of Indian thought on Eliot's neglected poems, *to the Indian who died in Africa*.

Before entering into a close analysis of the poem, it would be relevant to trace the channel through which Eliot derived his knowledge of Hindu philosophy and scriptures. The climate of ideas in which Eliot was born and lived during the most impressionable and formative period of his life contained an unmistakable element of Indian thought. The St. Louis's philosophical movement had lovers of Indian thought among its members. The elite of new England, popularly called "the new England Brahmins" read some of scriptures of Indian through translation Emerson, the typical

representative of this made a careful study of Indian text and also made elaborate notes on them in his journals.

Again, when Eliot entered Harvard, it was Harvard's golden era. William James, Santayana, Irving Babitt, Josiah Royce, George Layman, Kittredge were lecturing there. The two famous orientlists Charles Rockell Lanman and James Houghton Woods were giving courses in Sanskrit and Pali. After his master's degree in 1910, Eliot studied

for some time at Paris, another renowned seat of Sanskrit studies. Back at Harvard in 1911, he enrolled in Lanman's Indic philosophy course. It is very difficult to say what exactly prompted Eliot to study Sanskrit and Pali after his Master's degree. It is quite difficult that he was following the example of his teacher, Irving Babitt. In many of the lectures of Babitt, a number of nuggets of wisdom from the scriptures of Indian particularly from Buddhist scriptures figured prominently. When Eliot was studying under Haughton Woods, his master was 'at work on his yoga system of Patanjali.' Eliot was really fortunately studying under the right teachers at the right time. The care with which he studied Indian scriptures is evident from what he said in his *After Strange Gods*: "Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year mazes of Patanjali's metaphysics of James Woods, left are in state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like school boys - lay in trying to erase from my mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of the Greek. My previous and concomitant study of European philosophy was highly better than an obstacles And, I came to the conclusion seeing also that the influence of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe Schopenhauer, Hartmann and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding - that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of the mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European which for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I don't wish to do".

From these words, it is evident that Eliot's study of ancient Indian literature and philosophy is not a casual attempt to gain superficial understanding of them. "He gave us his study of -Indian philosophy for reasons better known to himself. He was not prepared to give up his European identity. An Indian response to his work, therefore, is not only as possible and as specifically valid at that of a Christian or a European one. Indeed, it is called for Eliot himself invited such an approach when he said: Long ago I studied the ancient Indian languages and while I was chiefly interested at that time in philosophy. I read a little poetry too and I know that man" shows the influence of Indian thought and sensibility".

One little known poem of this famous poet "To Indian who died in Africa' illustrates his full grasps of Indian culture and philosophy. His direct use of the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad in *The Waste*

Land is quite well known because Eliot himself directed his readers to read the Upanishadin in his notes. Therefore, it needs no further comment. Surprisingly enough though the greatest bulk of critical writing attention of the critics. The poem was written originally for a commemoration volume. But later, Eliot on modern poets is devoted to a study of Eliot's poetry, this beautiful poem of his has escaped the was persuaded by Bonamy Dobree to preserve it because Dobree liked it. Commemorating on the topic of diversity and unity in culture in his *Notes Towards a Definition of culture*. Eliot maintained that a society consisting of classes is better suited for the preservation and growth of culture than the modern idea of classes or castes result from honours given to different social studies. For a living culture to exist the boundaries of social compartments should be so flexible as to enable an individual to rise from one level of this ideal and nourishing flexibility led the evolution of the society into a blind alley, yet it kept a some of society to another with a ready social acceptance. In India, which has no homogeneity of race, the lack living values very much alive of for centuries. In course of time, this system of values got assimilated into the very way of thinking and feeling of every Indian Eliot brilliantly echoes this rooted feeling in his lines: A man's destination is his own village, His own fire and his cooking.

To sit in front of his door at sunset, And see his grandson and his neighbours's grandson. Playing in the dust together.

Though evils of such tradition bound and custom-ridden society are too many to mention, one should not forget the subtle emotional security derived from this rigid pattern of traditional Hindu life. The traditional Hindu life is not a mere clinging to a set of dead and dogmatic beliefs. On the contrary, is a rooted life promoted by blood kinship of the same people living in the same place. Therefore, the Hindu who follows this order of life leads a full and complete life though it is in a way, narrow and circumscribed. Eliot gives a vivid picture of this homogeneous life in the lines:

Scarred but secure, he has many memories,
Which returns at the hour of conversation,
(The warm and the cool hour, according to the climate) Of foreign men, who fought in the foreign places?
Foreign to each other.

This is only side of the pictures. Hindu life, firmly rooted in the soil, developed a philosophical basis also. For a Hindu at the spiritual level the goal of life journey is not merely to live in that same place where his ancestors lived. On the contrary, the chief goal of life is to get united with the Absolute. In a particular birth, every orthodox Hindu believes, a man may have to live and die as he is destined to in the particular life but, ultimately the individual must merge with the Absolute. This is perhaps what Eliot implies when he says about the soldiers who died:

A man's destination is not his destiny
Every country is home to one man,

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And exile to another, where a man dies bravely.
At one with his destiny, that soul is his.
Let his village remember.

Where human life has its value only in relation to the ultimate union with its source, the right action of man is bound to be fruitful even if not here and now. So, what may appear as a failure in particular life could be, in fact, it is bound to be a success in view of the ultimate goal of human life. As there is no question of failure in the case of right action seen from this point of view, it is futile to think of success or failure. It is equally futile to think of one's country, race or action. The last stanza of Eliot's moving poem contains this brilliant universal Hindu thought:

This was not your land or ours;
But a village in the Midlands;
And one in the five Rivers, may have the same grave yard
Let those who go home tell the same story of you;
Of action with a common purpose, action,
None the less fruitful if neither you nor we,
Know until the movement after the death,
What is the fruit of action.

In Four Quarter, Eliot gives a full account of the many sides implication of what Krishana meant when he thought Arjuna this ethics of detached action. However, even if we do not take into account of the presence of Indian thought in his *The Waste Land* and *The Four Quarters*, this unduly neglected poem adequately reveals Eliot's mastery of Indian thought and philosophy. As we have seen in the poem. Eliot depicted Indian life from the smallest domestic detail to the highest philosophy with an ease that reeks of his perfect mastery. It is not absorbed more of Indian thought and Indianness in two or three ears of Sanskrit study than many a scholar has done in a life study and travel.

II. Conclusion:

T.S. Eliot's poetic journey demonstrates that literary creation is never confined to its own cultural boundaries but is enriched by universal philosophies and traditions. Eliot's engagement with Hindu scriptures and philosophy added profound spiritual depth to his modernist poetry. Concepts drawn from the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita such as the cyclical nature of time, detachment self discipline and the pursuit of peace enabled him to respond

to the fragmentation and despair of western modernity with a vision of inner stability and transcendence. The concluding invocation

shantin shantin shantin in the waste land epitomizes this quest for harmony symbolizing the possibility of moving from chaos toward spiritual liberation.

In conclusion, Hindu influence not only broadened Eliot's intellectual and poetic horizon but also universalized his literary voice. By integrating eastern wisdom with western concert into a bridge across cultures making him one of the most distinctive and timeless voices in world literature.

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