

# A Study on the Writing Style of T.S. Eliot

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## ABSTRACT

From times immemorial the Indian thinkers thought of a need of philosophy to be developed to know how to lead the life in its best. But appreciated the intricacies of Indian philosophy, T.S. Eliot wrote the great philosophers of India "make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys".

In his essays, Eliot always seem to adopt the middle way "so here I am in the middle way the Madhyamika Buddhism between their relative and the absolute. This Buddhist principle appeared in Eliot's graduate essays in Western Philosophy in 1913 as :

..." what is here germane, is the fact that in which direction you go.... The crudest experience and the abstrusest theory end in identity, and this identity I called the absolute. If you choose to call it nothing I will not dispute the point. But whichever it is both beginning and the end".

## 1. Introduction

T.S. Eliot was born in an Anglo-American family in 1888 remarkably made a comparative evaluation between the Indian thinkers and Western philosophers. Though, being an admirer of Bertrand Russell, Heri Bergson, Josiah Royce and R.G. Collingwood, took up his work in philosophy in 1911 at Harvard Graduate School. In the beginning he took up MA literature but of T.S. Mathews insistence, decided to continue his doctorate in philosophy.

He took up Indic philosophy, (the elementary Sanskrit) under Prof. C.K. Laxman, the most prominent Sanskritist. Along with the Western philosophy he continued working under Laxman in Indic philosophy, the Pali, the philosophical Sanskrit. And in 1912-1913, he chose Indic philosophy under Prof. James H. Woods and started learning the Yogasutras of Patanjali.

Eliot's graduate program was for the Asian philosophy and philology. Most of his notes and essays talks about his interest in Oriental philosophy. The Western philosophers like the Plato, Epicurus, Spinoza, Kaut, Hegel and Russell focused on the difference between appearance and reality. But Eliot was totally against to this point of view. He was successful in finding an option also in Francis Herbert Bradley's *Ethical Studies*.

Apart from his doctoral dissertation at Harvard University, he also read the Dhammapada, the Yogasutras of Patanjali, The Mahabharata, The Ramayana and The Upanishads to understand the nature of duality of the self. It clearly indicates T.S.Eliot's engrossment with the imbibition with the Buddhist ways of life and trying to pervade it through his Christianity. The Oriental philosophy concentrates on the problem of human limitations and the belief of erudition left him in a "state of enlightened mystification".

Damayanti Ghosh has rightly acclaimed : "Evidently he was affected by Eastern poetry only where it was most austere and least romantic, mystical without the sensuous aspect of

mysticism. We cannot doubt Eliot, being the sort of poet he was, felt at home in Hindu Buddhist philosophical texts and they definitely contributed to his poetic development".

Due to his study of Oriental philosophy his mental susceptibility, his intuition is provoked and at the same time fostered and cherished by the perpetual wisdom of the East. T.S.Eliot was swayed by these readings. Abstaining from sensuality, because it breeds only suffering-- preached by Buddha in *Buddhism in Translation* by Henry Clarke. Warren might have influenced him even more. The Oriental religious texts brought the perceptiveness of Eliot to its zenith.

Eliot adopted Buddhism to repair the fragmentation of culture which was the result of disaster of World War I. His relationship with religion is described "as process of elimination and rejection".(Mc Nelly Kearns 88). Buddhism gave him a substantial way of spiritual and ethical path to follow. Buddha advises his disciples to refrain themselves from sensuality. Perceiving this, "O priests, the learned and noble disciple conceives an aversion for the impressions received by the eye". (Warren 352)

Patanjali instructs the self to curb the thought waves to eliminate the ego sense to attain the real. Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms* "ordains yoga for the annihilation of thought waves in the mind". Eliot along with James Hanghton Woods, read and appreciated this book for the priority it has shown towards the strong control of the mind. Eliot experienced bitter afflictions between the experiences of the Self and the not self which resulted in pulverizing towards the spiritual assignment.

*The Wasteland* a firm determination to dispel the doubts between a Self and the self. For instance the Prajapati sharing the Buddha as narrated in the Brihadanyak Upanishad.

Having read the Mahabharata and Patanjali, Eliot came across many such instances showing the Self and the not self and so it has left such an impression on him that he might have got influenced by the admonition of the Buddha to irrigate the

dormant seed of Bodhi (wisdom) tree in the garden of heart for redemption. Eliot gained an experimental knowledge of the self though his readings of the Oriental philosophies by which he was able to make himself get rid of the fire of passion that consumes the self.

## 2. Writing Style of T.S. Eliot

In the East, mainly in India, philosophy is that branch of theology which deals with nature and is a means of salvation, through which one can attain release from this world of pain and suffering. This is the main reason for Eliot to value Indian philosophy rather than the Western. Salvation is the disguising quality of Buddhism. Salvation for the Buddhist is not a mere exit from this world but a cognitive change which is a final release from the cycle of reincarnation attained by extinction of all desires and individuals existence, culminating in absolute blessedness. Till late 1932, Eliot used the salvation-moksha-nirvana concept in the etiology of religious conversion, which he described as "Simply the removal of any reason for believing anything else. The erasure of a prejudice, the arrival of the skepticism which is the preface to conversion".

Wherever Eliot discusses philosophy as a profession or an enterprise all through his essays – is a journey or of a process in directions. In his essay *Degrees of Reality*...

"The token that a philosophy is true, is, I think, the fact that it brings us to the exact point from which we started. We shall be enriched, I trust, by our experiences on the Grand Tour, but we shall not have been allowed to convey any material treasures through the Custom House. And the wisdom which we shall have acquired will not be part of the argument which brings us to the conclusion : It is not part of the book, but is written in pencil on the fly-leaf".

Skepticism is not regarded as a machinery of faith. Not even by Home and Voltaire. But Eliot felt skepticism to be regarded as a virtual religion – he calls it a faith – a high and the difficult one, in the type script, "The Validity of Artificial Distinctions". And after completion of his advance studies in philosophy in published article he expressed "capacity for believing" – the celebrated skeptic to be – Bertrand Russell. And through the Buddhist thought, Eliot learnt that skepticism is consistent with religion.

..."when I peruse Mr. Russell's little book. What I Believe, I am amazed that Mr. Russell's capacity for believing .... St. Augustine did not believe more".

And about his own religious conversions he mentioned in the only sermon which he delivered .... as the result of "pursuing skepticism to the utmost limit."

Eliot always wanted to be known as a relativist. The theoretical statement written by Eliot in 1916 in his doctoral dissertation is thoroughly relative...(and) exists only in a context of experience with which it is continuous.

Eliot consecration towards the ideology is somewhat difficult to understand. According to him a "point of view" should be the involvement of a number of convincing views

though they may be tentative but yet precise. Eliot applied the 'perspectivist' argument to his preface to one of his religious texts.

"There are some readers who...regard Asiatic literature as the role repository of religious understanding ; there are others who...refuse to venture further than a narrow Christian tradition. For both kinds of reader, it is salutary to learn the Truth...is not wholly confined to their own religious tradition, or on the other hand to an alien culture and religion... I am aware also that there are readers who persuade themselves that there is an "essence" in all religions which is the same, and that this essence can be conveniently distilled and preserved.

Such readers may perhaps be reminded that no man has ever climbed to the higher stages of the spiritual life, who has not been a believer in particular religion or at least a particular philosophy...I was only in relation to his religion that the insights of any one of these men had its significance to him, and what they say can reveal its meaning to the reader who has his own religion of dogma and doctrine in which he believes".

During his lectures on the Tendai school, Anesaki dealing with the reconciliation of the diversity of views within Buddhism familiarized Eliot on these reasoning. He said "Tendai" "wishes to keep both diversity and unity; explaining the latter by the former".

Though the origins and significations of Eliot defense are overlooked, yet it is a well known fact that he is a defender of tradition. He is an advocate of tradition and practice, and his devotion is not expression of cultural absolutism but almost antithetical. The Radical Skepticism, an aspect with regard to a philosophical perspective. Eliot accepted and incorporated Buddhism for Salvation. Salvation as the freedom from assumptions and hypothetical constructs- And as a result a direct enroute to epistemological nirvana.

Unlike the Europeans and Americans who failed to find a foothold of hope and authority, Eliot was successful in finding a connection between religion and culture because till then he utterly lost all hopes of finding meaning because he wanted to write for all ages.

What stands out from the beginning in Eliot's poetry is his unique style and cunning. He uses his own form of language that appeals to the reader at the moment. He describes ideas and gives vivid images that seem almost realistic to the person reading it and he makes one feel as if part of the poem. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Portrait of a Lady are as striking today as they were in 1917.

## 3. Conclusion

A writers interpretation of the world strictly influences his literary performance. T.S. Eliot literary style was exceedingly melancholy because the era that he was living in was filled with anguish and depression. His works of literature vary from his use of traditional dramatic structure to mythical method. Eliot's perception of life as nothing more than a struggle is expressed in his literary works by his use of realistic themes such as

depression, human isolation and through his religious imagery. For example, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is a dramatic monologue about love. On the other hand, *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday* is more mythical and explains deeper into religion and God. Eliot created his writing style based on his own personal experiences; therefore his poems all show incredible skill.

Eliot's writing technique differs from many other poets of his time such as William Butler Yeats whose mood was not

expressed as often in his works. Eliot's writings aim to touch peoples lives and try to connect with them. His intentions were to demonstrate real life by bringing out true emotion. He did this by using real life scenarios that people could be more familiar with, rather than romance and adventure. He was part of the anti-romantic revolution; therefore his poems have a deeper meaning. His poems are more of a combination of mythical, philosophical and Christian imagery in order to find a poetic way to poetically describe a modern dilemma.

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