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The Waste Land: An Expression of Disillusionment of the Post War Generation. A Brief Analysis

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Abstract

T.S. Eliot's poetry is a very important landmark in the Twentieth century literature. The poem reveals the disillusionment caused by First World War. It also shows dissatisfaction with the so-called scientific achievement and on industrial progress Europe and ushered new value of modern society. As a historical landmark in English poetry The Waste Land throws light on the living condition of people belonging to different sections of the society in the modern world and Critics consider it as a basic document on contemporary society. Actually, the First World War did not solve the problems of Europe. On the other hand, it led to establishment of 'Communism' among many European capitals. Thousands of refugees moved all over Europe in search of food and shelter. Eliot thinks communism is no solution to the problems of Europe because of its violence and godlessness and this tragedy is poignantly in the poem in the image of women in the last section of the poem. Eliot recorded not only disillusionment of the modern generation but spiritual disease of the age. It refers to a universal tragedy of man, spiritual sterility and lack faith and character. The world had to undergo pains and sufferings because the current values of material civilization. Eliot's The Waste Land undoubtedly had an immediate relevance to the atmosphere, mood and temper- i.e., the years following the end of World War-I. Critics of 1930's felt that the poem's importance lay in its reflection of the decay of the western civilization. However, the poem goes beyond the immediate situation to embody a universal dilemma. The poem has a contemporary relevance and it has also a visionary and timeless quality at the same time. I think, this study will be helpful to understand Eliot's poetical themes, poetical values, conflict of the modern mind and a picture of spiritual chaos of European society. In this paper a little attempt has been made to explain the poem 'The Waste Land as an expression of disillusionment of post war generation, a vision of desolation and spiritual draught.

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Introduction

The Waste Land of T.S. Eliot is still the most influential poem of our age. F.R. Leavis says: "Nothing else so truly reflects the age and redeems it". The poem was an immediate relevance to the atmosphere, mood, and temper of the time in which it was written. Critics feel that the poem's importance lay in its reflections of the decay of the western civilization. To a large extent the poem epitomises the emotional, intellectual and psychological temper which constituted the "Decade of Despair" which mainly followed the First World War". Indeed, it reflects the disorder, disturbance and confusion of thoughts prevalent in the poem. Having said that it is not merely a social document, the poem goes beyond its

scene of origin to represent a universal dilemma, presenting a picture of spiritual emptiness, a general lack of aim and sexuality devoid of emotion, also reflecting all the periods of the history of mankind. Eliot has brought the past and present together to create a vision of the spiritual barrenness characterising ordinary human beings. The Waste Land is not a poem which stops at being a "social document". Its framework of myth and allusive technique, its use of juxtaposition of the modern and Elizabethan scenes, its presentation of characters and scenes of seduction and violation of women, the images of dryness and lack of water- all these give the poem as an expression of disillusionment of the post-war generation and this study will be helpful to

understand Eliot's poetical value, themes and conflicts of the modern mind as well as a picture of spiritual echoes of European society.

Objective of the Study

- To study the poem as an expression of disillusionment of post-war generation as well as a picture of spiritual barrenness of European society.

Methodology

- A qualitative method has been used for the research work. Books and Articles have been preferred as secondary sources. And several poems have been selected as primary sources to understand Eliot.

Analysis of the Topic

Disillusionment and neurotic boredom in the period after First World War have well expressed in T.S. Eliot's most celebrated poem *The Waste Land*. Most of the critics are of the view that the poem is a plight of a whole generation, the poem expresses disgust with modern civilisation and with the post-war society. Eliot has introduced various parallels with the great literature of the past and places them next to lines describing the barrenness of England. The poem makes a tremendous impact on the post-war generation- based on the legend of Fisher King in Arthurian Cycle. The poem presents the contemporary London as an arid, waste land. It is built round the symbols of drought and flood representing death and rebirth. The dead or the dying civilisation of England is portrayed. The people are weary and disillusion and depressing. The feel that civilisation them. Their elders had glorified science and democracy, peace and progress. After war, there is spiritual barrenness everywhere, people want to forget the past and have nothing to look forward to future, no faith, no belief. The predicament has forced them to have a good time to give themselves up to sensual pleasant. The poem gives poetic expression to the underlying spirit of the 20th century contrasting its bitterness with richness of life in classical and Elizabethan time.

As a Social Document

The Waste Land is a social document of our time, a poem which throws light on the problems and perplexities of modern civilization. Eliot is not enamoured of the golden past nor does he leave a sigh for the vanished glory of the past. He is not an escapist or romanticist; he is a stern realist who lays his hand on the pulse of the modern man. To a large extent, *The Waste Land* epitomises the emotional, intellectual, and psychological temper which constituted the "Decade of Despair" that followed the First World War. It reflects the disorder, disturbance and confusion of thoughts prevalent in the poem.

A Panorama of Post-war Generation

Undoubtedly, the poem *Waste Land* is a picture of post-war generation. The characters in the poem amply serve to bring home to us all the psyche malady which taken hold of post war Europe. If that "waste land" it is but natural that we meet with boredom, hopelessness and depression, mental disintegration and pathetic efforts to find the fragments of a shattered faith. In the poem, we see characters who have lost the ability to live life fully-Madam Sosostri, the fortune teller knows nothing of the mysteries of life; life has lost the all variety and distinction for Mrs. Equitone; Lil, at thirty-one, looks too old; the typist and seducer have sexual intercourse

in a mechanical and emotionally indifferent manner; the demobbed. Albert and loitering heirs of city directors want to have "a good time"

Not knowing what it is. In the poem we meet characters such as the Cumean Sybil with her death wish, sweeny the crude client of Mrs. Porter, procuress, a victim of nerves and hysterical relationship with her lover Belladone. All these characters collectively represent the state of mind of the educated people immediately after the First World War.

A Universal Dilemma

The poem *Waste Land* is not merely a social document; the poem goes beyond its scenes of origin to represent a universal dilemma. It represents a picture of spiritual emptiness, a general lack of aim and sexuality devoid of emotion, it's reflecting not merely a set period of time, but epitomising all the periods of the history mankind marked by such features. Infact, Eliot has brought the past and present together to create a vision of the spiritual barrenness characterising ordinary human beings. There might be an occasional Buddha and a St. Augustine, but ever the times of such saints suffered from a lack of religious faith and purpose and prevalence of lust and futility. Thus, Eliot managed to give universality to his poems in a number of ways. As a symbol of modern uprooted civilization, the poem can be described as a symbol of modern civilization. Eliot has got not only the title but the plan and a good deal of symbolism of his poem from Jessie Weston's "From Ritual to Romance" a book on the Grail legend. He also acknowledges his debt to Frazer's "The Golden Bough". Eliot uses his knowledge of the recurring pattern in many myths- the close union in all myths of the physical and spiritual and the basic relationship between sex and religion-to give a new sense of timeless vision to his poem.

Antiquity and Contemporaneity

The modern aridity of spirit is well conveyed through images which bring to mind ancient references. The "stony rubbish", the dead tree which gives no shelter, the dry stone devoid of any sound of water, convey to us the terrible desolation of the modern waste land. There is a close parallel to the arid land as depicted by Jessie Weston. The picture also recalls Christian sources. Ezekiel and the Ecclesiastes also refer to waste land with "dry bones". The images revolving on dryness signify the drying up of spiritual faith in the world with the result that the life-giving water is no more, and the people are experiencing a death in life.

General truths are expressed in the poem: Aridity and sterility characterise the human situation. A life devoid of spirituality in a death in life, but it is not particular to the modern situation. Thus, Eliot seeks to point out that sterile degeneration is inherent in the human situation, and the need for regeneration has always been felt. In this sense, the poem can be called merely a representation of decay of western civilization. It reflects the Christian view that original sin has degenerated man and his salvation lies in faith and belief in God and religion more than ethical conduct alone.

Sterility and Ugliness of Modern Sex Relationship

Eliot has given us the reactions of people towards nature in various periods of history. The poem is delineated by a feeling of anxiety-a vague apprehension of danger. Basic to the spiritual aridity of the contemporary waste land is its meaninglessness and mechanical sex relationship. In "Game of Chess", the portrayals of two women recall the myth of the

rape of Philomela. After her rape by the barbarous king Tiresias, Philomela was changed into a nightingale. The rape was followed by the land becoming arid. The victory of lust led to ruin; the modern waste land has also risen in a similar manner. When he writes:

And still she cried and still the world pursues” He is apparently involving the world in the barbarous Tiresias action. Thus, to “dirty ears” the nightingale’s song is not the “invisible voice” but “jug, jug”- a coarse sound. In the two scenes following the Philomela reference- the two couples presented have no meaningful love relationship, but a sterile and unsatisfying relationship. If one woman’s life is aimless the other’s is afraid of having threatened with the loss of domestic security. Lil is afraid of having more children and this corresponds to the infertility or barrenness of the mythical waste land.

There is also a parallel dawn between the present and the waste land of the Fisher King. In that myth, according to one version of it, the cause of aridity fell on the land as a result at some maidens frequenting the shrine being raped. The violation of a woman symbolises the loss of spiritual and religious faith. Again, Lil’s loss of any desire to bear children also corresponds to the Fisher King’s impotence. The Lady of the Rocks and the Lady of the situations, both the symbolic of the modern situation, represent the absence of the possibility of any faithful relationship. The disastrous emotional aridity of the contemporary world and its spiritual emptiness is represented through the rape and violation of women in ancient myth.

In the “Fire Sermon” we have two situations which juxtaposing the modern and the ancient serve to emphasise the sterility and sordidness of sex in the modern age. The situation of the typist by the clerk implies a mechanical physical relationship devoid of connotations. Indeed, all these emphasise the spiritual aridity, the waste land of the present.

A Poem on the Human Condition

The use of the Fisher King myth universalises the contemporary situation of spiritual bareness. In Jessie Weston’s work “From Ritual to Romance”, there is the concept of the land which has become arid because of the infirmity of the king. The curse of aridity can be removed only by the young Knight who undertakes the quest for the Grail, reaches the castle and ask the myth in combination with the fertility cults which he found in Frazer’s “The Golden Bough”. The spiritual aridity and lust of the modern situation are sought to be represented in terms of ancient myth in order to universalise this situation.

Indeed, aridity and sterility characterise the human situation. A life devoid of spirituality in a death in life, but it is not particular to the modern situation. Here Eliot seeks to point out that sterile degeneration is inherent in the human situation and the need for regeneration has always been felt. Thus, the poem can be called merely a representation of the decay of western civilization. It reflects the Christian view that original sin has degenerated man and his salvation lie in faith and belief in God and religion more than ethical conduct alone.

Findings: As per the study of the topic, it is found that-

1. Disillusionment and neurotic boredom are clearly expressed in the poem.
2. Full of sterile and ugliness in modern human relationship.
3. A poem on the human condition.
4. Overall, a record of post war generation.

Conclusion

In the conclusion it can be said that The Waste Land is not a poem with “Formal Structure”. In the constant juxtaposition of past and present, Eliot found a method could effectively enlarge the vision of the poem. It is a poem which invites us into a world of “Broken images”. It is a modern epic. It deals with the cry of humanity of the whole generation.

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