

Research Paper

BROKEN IMAGES: INFLUENCE OF T.S.ELIOT ON POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH POETS.

CHIRIVELLA RADHIKA HANUMANTHARAO  
LECTURER, DEPT. OF ENGLISH,DNYANASADHANA COLLEGE,  
OFF EASTERN EXPRESS HIGHWAY,NEAR ETERNITY MALL,  
THANE (W).MAHARASHTRA., INDIA.

ABSTRACT

*T.S.Eliot had been very influential in shaping Modernist Poetry. He was instrumental in bringing about a revolutionary change in the language and images of the 20th century poetry. His poetic shorthand became inspirational model for many 20th century poets, World over. Eliotian devices are use of concrete shocking images, ironic use of myth and far-reaching symbolism. These devices became the benchmark for the 20th century poetry.*

*This Paper is an attempt to trace the impact of Eliot on Arun Kolatkar and Keki Daruwalla, the Post- Independence Indian English Poets.*

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T.S.Eliot's poetry marks a complete break from 19th century tradition, both in its theme and setting, as well as in its technique. It is a new kind of poetry, the result in part of the poet's reaction to the decadent and devitalized Georgian poetry of the early 20th century, and in part of his desire to mirror the complexity and intricacy of modern life. Modern life is predominantly urban, and so the setting and the themes of his poetry are Urban. He does not sing of “Rainbows, Cuckoos, Daffodils, and timid Hares”, in the manner of his contemporaries, the decadent Georgian poetry. We do not get in him the romance of far-off lands or of a sentimentalized English countryside. Neither do we get from him the romance of Love. Love is never the central theme of his poetry. 'Love' in his poetry receive a gentle ironic treatment. Such lovers as there are in his poetry are disillusioned and their love unsuccessful. Love degenerates into lust, and the perversion of the sexual function is shown to be the root cause of degeneration and decay. Eliot's sense of his own age is seen in the picture of a debilitated and rotten civilization, which is presented by his poetry. People are often governed by selfish and self-seeking motives: they and their institutions are equally corrupt and torpid. Money values prevails, there is gross materialism and spiritual sterility.

“The Waste Land”, published in 1922, had a tremendous impact on the entire literary world. It is a poem of about four hundred forty lines in five parts entitled as (1) The Burial of the Dead (2) A Game of Chess (3) The Fire Sermon (4) Death by Water, and (5) What the Thunder Said. In this poem, Eliot embodied an intense vision of the post-war disintegration of European civilization. 'The Waste Land' is a wilderness of the spirit viewed mostly against the background of squalid London life. Through this “heap of broken images”, Eliot holds up the barrenness of life from which faith has fled. The scattered vision, of spiritual disruption, opening with the moving lines ---

“April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
dull roots with spring Rain” 1.

No doubt it is an extremely difficult and obscure poem, yet it

has an atmospheric unity, and certain parts of it are of undesirable beauty, in its blend of mockery and deep compassion, of brilliant irony and wit with the most poignant emotion. The distortion of values is brought out frequently by means of ironic contrasts. Eliot's use of irony is not always so simple; he uses the surface irony and deeper irony. A distinctive feature of Eliot's imagery is his use of picture-images. Picture images are images of people and objects caught in action.

In the whole of “The Waste Land”, we will come across many broken images, which are unrelated pictures, but are put together to give a coherent whole of meaning. Eliot also uses the ironies of the modern life along with spiritual deterioration, etc. We can also identify the similar techniques in the Post-Independence Indian English Poetry. The Indian English Poets, of the Post-Independence era, have also been influenced, by Eliot and his poetic practices. Despite living in Anti-colonial and Post-colonial moods, Indian English Poets like Arun Kolatkar and Keki Daruwalla, have not tried to move away from Eliot's influence.

Arun Kolatkar, a renowned poet of the Post-Independence era, has clearly been influenced by the style of T.S.Eliot, in the use of broken images, ironies of modern life, as well as the spiritual deterioration, till some extent in few of his poems. So, let us examine a few poems from “Jejuri”, in the light of Eliot's poetic theories and practices. In 'The Bus', the following opening lines are:

“The tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down,  
On the windows of the state transport  
Bus all the way up to Jejuri” 2.

Here we can see how beautifully Kolatkar uses the reductive images. There is an image of the reflection of pilgrim's face in the old man's glasses. Again towards the end, the poet says:

“When you get off the bus  
You don't step inside the old man's head” 3

This is again an irony of the modern life, as most of the time, when we go to religious tours, we mostly have God's thoughts as we try to be away from the worldliness, but here we find, the pilgrim on his way to Jejuri, he concentrates

in every minor things, but keeps God distinctly away from his thoughts, and also shows that the pilgrim is detached in his way out for a pilgrimage.

In the poem “The Priest”, we come across the ironies of modern life in a temple, from the opening lines of the poem:  
“An offering of heel and haunch  
On the cold alter of the culvert wall  
The Priest waits” 4

Normally, the priest is supposed to be busy with the puja, but here he is waiting for the pilgrims, as if a seller is waiting for his customers, later he is found to have a worldly desires, rather then having a spiritual thoughts, I quote:

“Is the bus a little late?  
The priest wonders  
Will there be a puran poli in his plate?” 5

Unquote. The road is used as an image, which is compared to the fortune line, on a dead man's palm, later Sun's rays on the face of the priest is compared to a village Barbar. Then the priest chants mantra as he chews the Betel nut, this shows how the poet uses the ironies of modern life to show the irresponsible and careless behaviour of the priest in modern life. Later towards the end, the poet uses images of a Cat for the priest and the Rat for the pilgrims. The poet considers the priest as the predator and the pilgrims as his prey.

In the poem “The Low Temple”, the poet describes about the God's in the dark, and whenever you want to see the face of the God, you have to light a Match Stick. When the pilgrim questions about the name of the God, the priest answers, the Eight Arm Goddess, and when you count, the arms are eighteen, but still for the priest it is Eight Arm Goddess. So the poet says:

“All the same. She is still an eight arm  
Goddess to the priest” 6

The belief of the priest stands for the orthodoxy belief and the priest becomes the symbol of Fundamentalism. This poem also marks the ignorance on the part of the priest. Actually priest's should keep the house of God bright shinning with the light, and he should know the name of the Goddess, as each one has their own name, later we see that he does not know, how many arms the Goddess has altogether, which directly reflects his spiritual decay and acts as a modern irony. In the second last line, we find lack of reverence in the heart of the pilgrim, as soon as he comes out of the temple, he lights a Charminar.

In the poem “Heart of ruin”, Kolatkar had juxtaposed the past with the present. This poem marks the degeneration and spiritual deterioration in the minds and lives of the priest and pilgrims at jejuri. The opening lines of the poem are:

“The roof comes down on Maruti's head  
Nobody seems to mind” 7

These lines show that though there is God's Idol, no one seems to bother. As place of worship should be well shinning with lamp and proper care of the temple should be taken, but no one seems to bother about it and so it has become the house of the mongrel bitch and her puppies as well as sometimes pariah puppies tumble over her. The poet uses the images, which are broken in literal sense, like the broken roof, broken tiles, broken collection box, as well as the dung beetle. Then he says that may be the maruti himself likes the temple better this way. Towards the end, the poet uses

modern irony, when he says:  
“No more a place of worship this place  
is nothingless than the house of God” 8

It shows a genuine doubt that if the house of God has come down, then where is God? Normally man takes shelter at God's feet i.e. the temple, but here God himself is in need of a shelter. These are some of Arun Kolatkar's poems from Jejuri, which depict the influence of T.S.Eliot in the use of imagery, spiritual deterioration and the ironies of the modern life.

Let us now examine some of the poems of Keki Daruwalla, who has also been influenced till some extent by T.S.Eliot's style of writing poems. In “Rumination”, the poet personifies the violence and hatred, he uses scenes of violence as well as the broken images, which moves from rain to cobra, reptiles, mortuary, disfigured woman, to burial and then again to rain, all these together reflect the inner fragmentation of man and his spiritual waste land. This poem also carries Eliotian sense of objectivity in depicting the images. There is a clinical distancing of Eliot used by Daruwalla in talking about mortuary, rat-holes and death. The poem also reflects the ironies of modern life as in Eliot's work. The rain and river have no cleansing effect on the modern man. In “The Waste Land”, river Thames ironically becomes a picnic spot. In “Rumination”, a river bath is reduced to a meaningless ritual.

Keki Daruwalla, in his poem “The Mistress”, uses the genealogical tree to describe his mistress as half-caste, of a Muslim midwife and a Goan cook. Then he specifies about the Babus and the English Professors, who had contributed for her one night, and also tells that her language is mixed, confused and complicated just as her life. This poem is a sustained metaphor like the Waste Land. If 'Waste Land' stands for spiritual degeneration of man, 'The Mistress' stands for Indian English. Daruwalla says that Indian English is a vain and confused like a prostitute. He also uses images in Eliotian mode, the images like Blister Bubble and Grilled promprets, remind us of Eliot's images in their typical Urbaneness. Also evident in the poem is gentle irony of the uneasy relationship between an Indian poet and English.

Both Kolatkar and Daruwalla are in many ways drawn towards Eliot. They share Eliot's imagist attitude towards language, his ironed precision of expression, standing urban images, ironies of modern existence and most importantly the clinical objectivity in treating the subject matter. They realize in many ways Eliot's theory of objectivity co-relative. Their images are co-relatives of their emotions, which they believe can never be directly expressed in life.

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3. Ibid, P-203.  
4. See Arun Kolatkar's 'The Priest' in Paranjape, Makarand (ed.). Indian Poetry in English. Madras: Macmillan India Ltd., 1993, P-203.  
5. Ibid, P-203.  
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7. See Arun Kolatkar's 'Heart of Ruin'.  
8. Ibid.

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