

## T.S. ELIOT'S VIEWS ON SPIRITUALISM AND MATERIALISM AND THEIR RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT WORLD

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### **Abstract**

*The principal objective of the present research article is to understand and analyze the concepts- Spiritualism and Materialism as reflected in T S Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' and 'Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock'. T S Eliot can be called a spiritualist as many of his poems are based on spiritual and moral values. In the present world it can be observed that religion and spirituality are fast deteriorating, and they have lost their values in the society. Materialism is rapidly getting hold of them. Modern man becomes spiritually degenerated and dead. At this time, T S Eliot gave a great contribution to revive their lost value and position through his poems. The paper focusses on bringing out T S Eliot's views on spiritualism and materialism which are realistic and relevant in the critical modern juncture. In the present work it is concluded that if modern man follows T S Eliot's ideas on spiritualism and materialism, he can lead a happy and peaceful life for sure.*

**Key Words:** View, Ideology Modern man, Spiritualism & Materialism.

### **T.S. Eliot as a Spiritualist**

Today, religion and spiritualism are fast deteriorating. Materialism is rapidly getting hold of them. Today's world is a materialistic world. In this material world man becomes spiritually degenerated and dead. Modern man becomes a possessor of modern materialism. Materialism ignores the religious faith and spiritualism in modern society. Thus, religion and spirituality lost their values in society. At this time, T.S. Eliot, being a versatile writer, during his long creative career, wrote poetry, prose, drama, critical and social essays etc. of which many works were based on spiritual and moral values. He gave a great contribution to revive their lost values and positions. Through his spiritual poems, he is acclaimed as 'spiritualist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century'. Most of his poems, directly or indirectly refer to the modern mechanized life. For example, in 'The Waste Land' he has used wider theme. It can be studied as a bitter criticism of the hollow and rootless modern civilization. And the possibility of spiritual rebirth is a constantly recurring theme in Eliot.

### **T.S. Eliot's Ideas on Spiritualism and Materialism**

Every age is marked with a certain distinction from its preceding and the age followed by it. If one talks about T S Eliot's age, it was marked with a kind of aggression and even abrupt growth from the previously existing culture which was set to be against humanism and romanticism. As science grew the world took its place as an off shoot of this poetry as also turned its attention from romanticism and Georgian poetry to realism. This change of turn in poetry is remarkably notice in the works of T S Eliot. The spirit of revolt is best seen in the poetry of T.S. Eliot who

sees life in its stark realism, “The heavy thud of bus traffic, the creaking of tramcars, the rattling noise of railway trains, the drone of an aero plane, all these find their echo in modernity.”

The outcome of modernism on poetry led to pessimism due to scattered dreams of romanticism and also the impact of fourth coming mechanical life. The introduction of machinery certainly created feeling of frustration and monastic life. This development of poetry was a compulsion and a matter of social consciousness. Thus, Houseman says, “The wages of a man is ‘dust’. Eliot considers man as ‘hollow’ and ‘stuffed’. To Yeats “human sorrow becomes an elemental passion, profound, eternal and burning like a flame.”

In the present study an attempt has been made to bring out T S Eliot’s views on Spiritualism and Materialism as reflected in his poems ‘Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock’ and ‘Journey of the Magi’.

### **Journey of the Magi**

‘Journey of the Magi’ is one of the celebrated poems of Eliot in which one can see the elements of spiritualism and materialism. In this poem, one of the wise men from the east who came in quest of Jesus and worshipped him soon after his birth recounts the obstacles they confronted during their journey. This journey symbolizes the path or way of life towards the spiritual world. The people, who are on their journey to meet Jesus, grumbled and ran away because they missed their liquor and women. Here, we can say liquor and women put the man away from the spiritual values or religious rituals, according to our Hindu religion. There is no shelter because they are spiritually dead. The spiritual world will not give the shelters for spiritually dead people. The cities are hostile and the towns are unfriendly, the villages are dirty and charged very price for everything. Here, the modern man leads commercialized life. They faced a lot of hard experience in the journey because they are spiritually barren and dead.

Spiritual regeneration is seen in this poem too. There is a running stream and water- mill beating the darkness and indicating bustling activity. The phrase ‘Water- mill beating the darkness’ shows the spiritual awareness of the modern man. In modern world he is too, materialized. There are three trees on the low sky and an old white horse galloped away in the meadow. Then they came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the door way. There are six hands at an open door, dicing for pieces of silver and feet of drunken men kicking the empty wine-skins. But there was no information, and so we continued and arrived at evening, not a moment too soon or late and were lucky enough to find the place where Jesus was born, and our quest ended satisfactorily. Here finding the place where Jesus was, is spiritual awareness of the materialistic man.

The quest for infant Jesus had been certainly worthwhile. The Magi would undertake it again, if they were given the chance. But what puzzled them was the effect of the quest on their faith. It has killed their faith in the old religion and given them a new faith. But it took away their peaceful mind, and with the old faith has also gone the unthinking assurance. The new faith is not yet able to give them positive joy. Thus, their journey seems to have had no creative significance, and it has brought no creative change with great weariness and disillusionment, he hopes for another death which would lead him to redemption. By this we can say the materialistic man’s journey is meaningless and insignificant.

Eliot’s treatment of the theme is symbolic, his old faith or faithlessness is dead and he is journeying towards a new faith. The quest is perilous and even the success of the quest carriers with it nostalgia yearnings for the old faith. The new faith appeals to them but even that fails to give them calm or happiness.

The method of the poem follows a pattern which T.S. Eliot has discerned in the prose of Lancelot Andrews, and the opening line of the poem is a direct quotation from one of his Nativity Sermons, in his sermons, Andrews forced a concrete presence upon his hearers even before extracting all the spiritual meaning of the text.

### **Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**

The 'Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock' appeared in Eliot's volume entitled 'Prufrock and Other Observations' in 1917. According to Maxwell, the poems of the volume contain in poem-form Eliot's immediate revolt against Georgian poetry of those times. The poetic thought of Prufrock illustrates the nature of Eliot's new poetry. To a great extent, the poems of this volume are receptive to the social environment of the poet's own class; but we feel that he is preoccupied with extreme examples of abnormal types. These poems exhibit the attitude of disgust at the quality of the civilization in which he found himself and which he was to portray more explicitly in his later poems. There is common, in all these poems, a feeling of imprisonment, in an empty, ugly and alien society and the impossibility to escape from it. It shows the barrenness of materialistic society. Here in this poem, Prufrock is a man of spiritual degeneration. Prufrock is a typical denizen of Eliot's poetic world, a representative of the men and women of our disillusioned world; he incarnates the essentials of the modern man. As such it may even be said that Mr. Prufrock is to Eliot what Satan was to Milton or Faustus was to Goethe. Eliot's Prufrock, the modern man, will not lay bare his heart if he is not sure that the person addressed to, belongs to his world that he cannot escape with his secrets elsewhere.

For Prufrock, love is not divine or platonic, it is materialistic, it is engrossing mundane and sexual, but he cannot or he does not wish to give a straight and direct expression to this earthly love. In the pale and sickly evening of the materialistic world, he wishes to walk through half-deserted streets where he would meet people retreating with significant mutterings. This reminds him of nights, restless nights in cheap are night hotels. Here we can see the restlessness of the modern striving for something without knowing what he is going for striving.

In this poem, Prufrock is unable to face actuality, he falters and speaks again through symbols, it suggests that Prufrock is not able communicate with the people. After this rather puzzling allusion to Michelangelo by which Prufrock is probably drawing the attention of his lady-love to a particular aspect of the life of the Florentine artist, he speaks in clearer images of direct significant. Mr. Prufrock's retreat into the world of despairing introspective day-dream, and his mingled self-pity and self-disgust are brought home to us by the images of the tortuous streets and the fog cat.

The symbols of his terror of social and sexual failure suggested the conflict in Prufrock's mind; it's typically, Prufrock is a materialistic and modern man, because he is spiritually distressed. The shrunken universe of his own nature will be set beside a series of suggestions and allusions which take us to a world of action and expression which are very different. John the Baptist, Lazarus, Heriot's works and days', Michel Angelo and Shakespeare all disturb Mr. Prufrock's pitifully enclosed Universe. But why is this inability of natural instinct to assert itself? There is the weary cry, "I grow old, I grow old". He grows philosophic. But philosophizing is not always the way of the balanced and the normal and especially the illusion among philosophers are generally out of their elements with life. Hence, his helpless abandon born of aimless brooding, here the materialistic life is aimless and meaningless because he lost the place in the seat of spiritualism. But he will have to begin when eyes have fixed him in a formulated phrase, and when he is sprawling on a pin and is pinned and wriggling on the wall. But even where he has

known the 'white bare arms', 'the disturbing perfume of a dress', how should he begin? So again, he tries to be vocal and significant thought of glaring images of dusk, narrow streets, lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaving out of windows, of seas and of afternoons and evening sleeping, sleeping peacefully smoothed by long fingers, tires or pretending to be sleep, stretched on the floor. He now wishes to be a pair of ragged claws to scuttle across the difficulties of the silent seas- the agonies of the struggle in the subconscious. But if he lets time pass after tea and cakes and ices, will he have the strength to force the moment to its crises? Though he has suffered all the spiritual upheaval of a prophet, he has not found any direction even for himself. Time is dragging him away from his moment of temporary decision. Yet in a minute there will be time of decisions and revisions.

Eliot's concept of 'Objective Correlative' is applicable to this poem. The poet exhibits the despair and passivity of a middle-aged man, Prufrock. The poem concerns with the spiritual sickness of Prufrock a type of man who flinches from asking the overwhelming question. Because of his timidity and want of self-confidence he would like to escape from his neurotic conflict even by means of anesthesia. The evening which is lifeless reflects the mental state of Prufrock. He is like a patient 'etherized upon a table'. This image suggests the mental vacuity of the speaker. Prufrock's hesitation, self-pity and self-disgust are all presented through a series of images. This is indirectly reference to the materialistic life. The winding street, which leads to the salon where he has to make the proposal of marriage, reflects the tedious argument in the mind of Prufrock.

When Prufrock enters into a room, he hears women talking of Michelangelo, the Italian sculptor known for his strength and virility. This reference to Michelangelo brings out Prufrock's own physical impotency and decay. His materialistic life has been literally occupied with nothing but coffee-drinking, each of his days is passing like a smoked cigarette. Prufrock's pathetic predicament is brought out by the image of a poor worm fixed to the wall by a sharp pin-point and wriggling there helplessly.

Eliot has made use of irony to communicate frustration and futility, squalor and seediness. The very title is ironical. The name 'Prufrock' implies a kind of wispy, defeated idealism and fatuity. The predicament of Prufrock is that he is a man driven by desire for something that he cannot achieve. In this way materialistic man died with unsatisfied or unachieved desire. It is indirect reference to materialistic life of modern man.

### **Conclusion**

The main objective of the study i.e., to understand and analyze the concepts Spiritualism and Materialism as reflected in T S Eliot 'Journey of the Magi' and 'Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' has been partially fulfilled. The present age is an era of advancement which has made people to have changes in their tastes and tendencies. In consequence the reading and writing habit is neglected. As we know the modern man is leading a monotonous life. Present unrest, frustration, violence is there, because the modern man has drifted away from views of great personalities, poets and philosophers. Even though, there are some ideologies/views in the society, the modern man does not show interest to follow them because of constraints. This work also assures that if ideologies/views of T S Eliot are given importance, and at least a few of them have been internalized, naturally the life will be happier than before. Another important finding of the study is that Eliot undoubtedly, is the greatest ideologist of 20th century. The loaded thoughts of Eliot are brought out which can be helpful for the modern man to come up in life and to lead a happy life.

Views of Eliot, undoubtedly, are more relevant to the modern world. He expressed his opinion on various matters after understanding and experiencing them. So, they are more realistic and appropriate. For instance, Eliot's idea of modern world seems to coincide with their principles of religion, man, culture and the world.

Thus, finally, it may be concluded that Eliot and views are realistic, appropriate, authentic, logical and relevant to this modern world.

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