

THE WASTE LAND AND THE AGE OF PACE: LONDON AND MUMBAI THE UNREAL CITIES

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ABSTRACT

T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land', is the most consequential and representative poem of the twentieth century. It is the most convincing presentment of social aimlessness, emotional and spiritual paralysis, decay, frustration, and disillusionment after the First World War. Eliot uses the phrase 'The waste Land' to convey the ideas of emotional and spiritual sterility and barrenness. The focus of my Paper is to compare the above attributes with present city, Mumbai. This city of dreams has many similarities with the modern London city of Eliot's wasteland. It is associated with all contaminations like corruption, black money, prostitution, rootlessness, commercialization of life, lack of religion, lack of human relationships, mental tension and politics. I have tried to track down the problems of present Mumbai city and have correlated them with the city of modern London.

Keywords: *Aimlessness, Spiritual Paralysis, Contemporary, Rootlessness, Attributes.*

Introduction

Eliot's 'The waste land' is assessed as one of the most important documents of its age, in which he used his whole poetic power to express the boredom, and the horror of the contemporary world. The presence of sterile degeneration and the need of regeneration is the general truth behind the poem and its central theme. Based on the legends of the Fisher king in the Arthurian cycle, the poem portrays London as a barren wasteland. The poem was written during the autumn of 1921 and first appeared in print in 1922 in combination of five sections. These five sections are not to be read in relation to each other rather they are five different portraits hung in one room. In the third section, 'The Fire Sermon', Eliot has addressed London as an 'Unreal city', full of confused and hopeless people who have devoted their lives for lust and nothing more than hollow entities.

Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.¹

The city is unreal because it is cut off from both natural and spiritual sources of life. Human beings seem like ghostly figures in this unreal city. The crowd flowing over the London Bridge has no more human identity than the river flowing under it. They are the victims of the machine-ridden civilization, the slaves of the deadening routine, divorced from the vitality of a living tradition. They walk down King William Street and watch the clock keeping the hours with a dead sound. They are busy in their own businesses and forgetting religious dogmas and emphasizing more on their worldly jobs. They live and die for their own selves, and not for others or for society.

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The same picture of London city we can see in Mumbai, the Financial Capital of India. This city is rapidly developing metropolitan city with a population of 20 million people. It is best known for its diverse individuality and has always attracted people from all walks of life and trade. Globally it is the second most densely populated city. Life in Mumbai is very faster and challenging than other parts of India. People have to compete with the clock to meet the desired living. The list of Mumbai's drawbacks is endless- the ever increasing population, the traffic jams, the poor quality of life, the associated stress and tension, the unhygienic environment, the pollutions, politics, lack of human relationships, commercialization of life etc. There are people, people and people everywhere. Crowded trains, crowded buses, crowded markets, crowded malls, crowded streets, gardens and restaurants what else can one expect in the most populated city? Migrants from every part of the country move to the city everyday in search of so called better life. As a commercial capital of the country, it has much appeal to anyone in search of work and better career prospects. People come and reside here with a sole dream of earning. But their dreams are more shattered here than fulfilled. To fulfill their primary needs, the struggle that they face is terrible. No place to live. Real estate prices are out of a normal person's reach. All public facilities are overburdened and traffic is a nightmare. The city runs 24 hours a day. The local train is the most popular and quickest way of commuting. Mumbai's local trains are extremely overloaded; the doors constantly have passengers hanging out of them. The local train is called the lifeline of Mumbai but nearby 9 to 10 people die everyday in train accidents. Ironically many of them never get identified or claimed and the BMC have to cremate them. Slums and chwals are there in the city with too much of poverty and sanitation issues. Dr. Kishan Pawar has rightly called it a 'City of Mess' as he writes:

thatches huts and sheds in slums
 curtained windows
 on topless towers
 moving shadows of restless souls...
 crows and vultures in the skies
 pigs in gutters in search of dirt.²

Eliot has described a complete picture of city life through the images of streets, parks, gardens, pubs, hotels, offices, and factories etc., which are fully evident in Mumbai. The described crises of modern London in 'The Waste Land' like elicit affair, spiritual and physical sterility, homosexuality, etc. are easily found in Mumbai city. People do not open up about their sensuality due to fear of social rejection. In 'The Waste land' Eliot has taken a very bold theme to reveal the reality of the world around. Most of the hastiness of life results from a perverted attitude towards it and this results in rapes, homosexuality, abortions and disinterested and passive attitudes towards this procreating impulse. In the third section of the poem Eliot has given the e.g. of a typist girl. Eliot writes-

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
 Hardly aware of her departed lover.³

This contrast makes the sterility and barrenness of modern civilization rather vivid and disappointed. Eliot gives another example of homosexual relationship exemplified by Mr. Eugenie. I think what Eliot has written in 'The Waste Land' is happening in all the current and upcoming metro cities including Mumbai. A vast number of gay men are married to women and leading a dual life. There are multiple issues like loneliness, social rejection, family pressure and fatigue caused by leading a dual life. Dysfunctional marriages, and high divorce rates are becoming a norm. To live in relationship is becomes today's fashion. Large numbers of people are staying unmarried till the age of 30. Prostitution is rampant and many girls are choosing it as an extra income to cope up the expenses of modern branded life, either by force or by choice. The new invention of Mumbai's young generation is 'The pizza reaches before the ambulance but a call girl might reach before pizza'.

Corruption and decadence of modern society along with, politics have been bunched together in Eliot's wasteland, so as in Mumbai. An important cause of disintegration of modern civilization is the enormous power wielded by politicians. Mumbai is always known for its spirit. But section of politicians, media bureaucrats, police and the state machinery abuse this term in general to placate and fool Mumbai people when the calamity or disasters strike due to their own incompetency and corruption. The events like bridge stampede, bomb blasts, terror attacks happen. And these people start singing praises the so-called spirit. There is no spirit; it is just the average middle class of Mumbai being exploited by the employer to turn up to work. That's the spirit, which makes Mumbai people go back to work soon after a

tragedy. It's basically a survival instinct. You have to head to work. Nuclear families isolated from their relations don't have the option to drop out of work. Whether through personal favors or bribes every individual living in Mumbai is involved. People give money for breaking traffic rules or for school and college admissions or for simply getting some work done.

In Eliot's Wasteland 'The Burial of the Dead' announces the presence of brown fog in a winter dawn and is later confirmed by 'The Fire Sermon' as the poet mentions the existence of brown fog in the winter noon. Usually, the fog of winter is not brown in color. It is the result of extreme pollution. During 18th and 19th Centuries, many industries were flourished in London and polluted the town. It is very easy to prove that the air of Mumbai is more contaminated than modern London. Mumbai, the financial capital, has earned the infamous title of being the most polluted city. The primary causes of air pollution in Mumbai are automobile exhaust, construction activity, and garbage dump yards. Living in Mumbai is becoming worse every year. There is construction across the city round the year that results in increasing the dust in the air, also as a result of the bad roads the vehicle travel much slower than they should thereby increasing the pollutants in the air.

Mental tension of the modern people is also shown in Eliot's Wasteland. Modern psychologist have shown that majority of people are abnormal. They suffer various types of mental illness on account of the worries and anxiety and challenges of the modern life. In the second section entitled 'A Game of Chess' the fashionable society woman called the lady of situation is bored with her own life and has become extremely neurotic. Her lover too suffers from mental exhaustion. He says-

I think we are in rat's alley

Where the dead man lost their bones.⁴

Similarly Lil has lost her interest in life She feels physically and mentally broken. The same picture we find in Mumbai. Most of the professionals in Mumbai suffer from stress. The major worries of working professionals are tight deadlines, missing targets, coping with pressure, office politics, long working hours, coupled with travel time from home to workplace, unsupportive and indifferent managers and work life balance. Daily life become so hectic like 9 to 6 job then spending 2-4 hours on travel to work, takes life out of you. Just run and run. There is no time for personal peace. People are exhausted with their lives. Living here is not everyone's cup of tea. The cost of life is too high that what you earn is exactly what you spend. It is just hand to mouth.

Programmed life so empty

Living fast and dying young city.⁵

Eliot has covered all most all-important issues in the wasteland, which are visible in Mumbai. He portrays how man has lost his faith in God and religion. In ancient time, the source of inspiration for life and achievement was faith. People really believed in traditions and valued the religions. They also used to believe in intimate human relationship. There was a joint family system and elderly people were respected. Character and saintliness were regarded as important assets. Moreover important than money and position was character and achievement. There were certain loyalties to the community and loyalties to the nation. Today the values have changed. People have become self centered and egoistic. Exploitation is the order of the day. Money is the God of the modern man. Hypocrisy is at a premium. Flattery is more important than money. Eliot has given us an example of modern businessman Eugenie, who carries his contracts and samples, documents and transit business in the hotel. Similarly the company directors and the executives hold picnics on the bank of the river Thames. In the fourth section Eliot has given an example of the Phoenician sailor, whose materialistic activity have come to an end with his death by water.

To sum up Eliot's 'The Waste land', is the best portrait of the intensity of the problems of modern world. It deals with social problem, but at the end of the poem Eliot has prescribed some solutions. In the last section 'What the Thunder Said,' he has suggested three ways of salvation, i. e. three commands of the thunder. 'DA', 'DA' and 'DA', which indicate- to give, to be compassionate and to control. These three things (Giving, compassion and control) are the written philosophical responsibilities of Hinduism and Buddhism. The first command "Da" suggests that each individual must sacrifice himself to the God(s), to other people, to the nation etc. the second 'Da' shows necessity of ones' release from the prison of one's own ego. Writer Dr. Kishan Pawar has very nicely wrote about this command that-

"We are all locked in the cell of isolation and our hearts do not melt with the misery of others. It is sympathy alone that would open this prison, which has been locked by pride"⁶

The third command is to control. Thus at the end there is some hope and salvation in the Waste Land. In order to save the modern world, rejuvenation is essential and Eliot has shown a light of hope for that. Here, thunder is the harbinger of rain, which will bring fertility in the wasteland. April will fulfill the summer promise with the help of rain. The thunder's potential promise of rain along with fertility is alike every citizen's responsibilities towards the society. Similarly it is possible to turn Mumbai city as a Utopia if the citizens are conscious. Through the revival of ethics, discipline, and good will, and thoughtfulness one can hope for something really positive. One can hope to regain a beautiful world. Air and water pollution can easily be minimized by personal and governmental initiatives. If we can hold back ourselves from lust then prostitution will automatically turn down from society. Religious belief and the practice of goodness can easily decrease pretense from society. Spiritual sterility can be healed by understanding and through traditional system. Infertility can easily be cured. In short, our collective initiatives can easily turn Mumbai into a real city from an unreal city.

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