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Eliotian Themes in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*



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Abstract :

The status quo during early twentieth century depersonalised the universe. Therefore, thematic similarity of dealing with human predicament caused by arid rationalism can be found as common theme of the modernist writers. Along with dealing with the plight presented in their works the article makes a comparative study of some of T. S. Eliot's poems with D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and thus points out similarities and dissimilarities of different thematic aspects among those works.

Keywords :

modern crisis, First World War, arid rationalism, spiritual value, instinct, intertextuality.

Research Paper :

Thematic similarity between Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Eliot's "The Waste Land" can be found in their presentation of conflict and self-conflict as the condition of social existence. The novel came out in 1913, and the poem in 1922. Yet, both texts present man as a physically torn, emotionally devitalized, and spiritually sick creature striving in a meaningless, and desacralized universe. 'Advancing industrialization, increased urbanization, the conquest of nature by technology – all these phenomena go to confirm the dominance of the spirit of mechanism' (Ghosh 53). These two works, being representatives of early twentieth century literary work, present the theme of the aftermath of 'globalisation and corporate exploitation' (Jain 5). These works were the products of a time when 'everyone's individual lives' as defined by Eliot in his letter to his father (dated 23rd December 1917) were 'so swallowed up in the one great tragedy that one almost ceases to have personal experiences or emotions' (*WL Drafts* xiii). So, they become parables of dehumanization of man in the modern situation. Thus if we trust the tales, despite Eliot's claim of *The Waste Land's* being 'a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life' (*WL Drafts* 1), the period pieces of 1910s and 1920s truly articulate 'the plight of a whole generation' (Richards 295) by presenting the component of a destabilised world in which the centre cannot hold things together. In their depiction of struggle for searching armour against the monsters of fragmentation and estrangement in a war-torn world, these litterateurs engage themselves in the battle started by Plato and Aristotle and later intensified by the Romantics.

Set against the backdrop of the First World War and its aftermath, the rats and dead men, the talk of demobilization, the vision of exploding cities, "The Waste Land" enacts a sense of displacement, rootlessness, which always remained with Eliot. The disintegration of European civilization is the scenario for what comes across as a general sexual, moral and spiritual collapse. In fact, like Baudelaire, Eliot also feels city to be psychological Hades. As did Frazer, in *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, envisage 'a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society,' (qtd. in Jain 142), so does Eliot in the lines 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden...' Here man becomes a 'thing' (Lawrence 181), is reified. Eliot writes on this theme in "The Waste Land":

At the violent hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,

The kind of job the miners residing in the 'Hell Row' (Lawrence 5) do entails mechanism. Industrialization of Britain had produced a breed of men who were too mechanical and uniform for Lawrence's taste. A mercenary industrialist man like Mr Pappleworth asks his workers to reduce themselves, to sink below the human. A mechanical man at work, Paul treats Clara like an animal. The spirit of mechanism is also suggested through the copying job he does at Jordan's. Even when he writes his first application, the narrative voice remarks, Paul, 'looked wistfully out of the window. Already he was a prisoner of industrialism' (Lawrence 103). Merry, old England giving way to mechanized, new modern England thus results in making of schism between body and spirit of the citizens. This disables people from expressing their thoughts and feelings and behave like themselves. Paul and Clara though being lovers have to act as superior and subordinate respectively to fulfil the demands of their employer at the artificial limb making factory. Indeed, they have to measure their 'life with coffee spoons' just as Prufrock does. The voice of Pappleworth in the *Sons and Lovers* has the similar function to the fanciful song 'Two Girls in Blue' sung by the girls as that of the human voice in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" since both of them awaken people to the pathetic realities of life. Thus, the spiritual agony felt by Eliot in the Modern age of social and psychological fragmentation is also reflected in the novel of D. H. Lawrence.

In Eliot's "Preludes" we have 'The burnt-out ends of smoky days' and 'women/ Gathering fuel'. Most of the people inhabiting the colliery area of *Sons and Lovers* also experienced the universal pain and anguish of people leading a life devoid of meaning and depleted of vitality as presented in Eliot's poetry. In Bestwood, the railways, and coal pits blighted the landscape. The colliery workers' dwellings were established. The gardens and parlours in front of the houses are 'uninhabited' (Lawrence 6). Lawrence's vision of the seamy aspect of life in these squalid colliery quarters looks like Eliot's vision of modern urban life as a wasteland. Thus both the writers' works become 'vignettes of modern urban experience in all its unromantic squalor, monotony and horror' (Jain 63). Men are smoking, and women are gathering fuel. In fact, as long as the life led by the miners and their wives looks 'decent' (Lawrence 6) from outside, the 'unsavoury' (Lawrence 6) inside life does not matter. The hollowness of life and existence depicted in the works resonate with the inner hollowness of the people as they concentrate on showiness instead of trying to find remedy for their unsavoury existence. The authors in their works very meticulously explore the characters' deplorably complex metropolitan existence with a touch of ridicule.

In the chapter entitled 'Passion', Clara and Paul make love on the bank of Trent river. They went down the riverbank for this purpose. This descending may be metaphorically related to

their spiritual decline. Lawrence's vision of such dangerous pleasures achieved by dark sex relates itself to the experience of Marie in the first section of "The Waste Land". Marie says, 'down we went' when she and her cousin, the Archduke, went on a 'sledge'. The emptiness and void associated with loveless sexual relationship causing alienation and sense of guilt is also there in the monologue of the nymph deserted by some city director in the third section of "The Waste Land" where she gives hint of unwanted pregnancy and consequent abortion. Alienation caused by lack of compassion and humanity is another issue with which both the writers deal. In "The love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Prufrock is hesitating about telling the ladies that he has 'watched the smoke that rises from the pipes/ Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out' of windows. He leaves his intent of communicating the idea unfulfilled as he thinks that his message might be misunderstood or get misinterpreted. The authorial voice in chapter 4 of *Sons and Lovers* says about Walter Morel, 'He was an outsider' (Lawrence 78) to the family. In the chapter entitled *The Release* it is commented that he 'looked [so] forlorn' (Lawrence 411). In spite of being a man without fear, he does not dare to look at the dead body of his wife. Paul experiences the same sense of alienation, in 'Derelict'. Getting release from every relationship, he moves around like a zombie, unable to paint, unable to make new friends. Alienation is encountered by the typist too in 'The Fire Sermon'. After her consummation of love with the 'young man carbuncular' (this description itself shows a sense of detachment), she paces 'about her room again, alone'.

In the second section of "The Waste Land", Eliot dramatizes loveless, deadlocked, or broken marriages. There is a communication gap between the neurotic woman and her husband. In response to her imploration to him to talk, he can only talk to her of the valley of death, 'Where the dead men lost their bones'. Lil is advised by a nose-poking, windy woman in the Pub Scene to look young so that her husband may have 'good time' with her. She also puts the question, 'What you get married for [if you don't want children]?' In fact, Lil looked old due to her bearing of six children, and taking of overdose of contraceptives. Lawrence, through the anecdotes, suggests this very meaninglessness, and destructive potential of marriage. *Sons and Lovers* is inhabited by people who married without really knowing why they are marrying, and repented afterwards. Modern class-division is a menace to the social institution of marriage. Gertrude Coppard, who came from a middle-class family, gets attracted to the lively young miner, Mr Morel. But her middle-class vanity makes her contemptuous of her husband. Her endeavour to reform him causes his life force to dwindle, and he is ruthlessly driven to disintegration and dissipation. Mrs Morel's son, William, is inclined upon marrying Gyp. Strangely enough, he does not know why he is getting married.

He is kept from breaking free by two factors: his own physical, passionate life, and social law or convention. It seems that if the institution of marriage did not exist William would never have considered of binding himself permanently to Gyp. Clara also married Baxter for the same reason as William was about to marry Gyp. She only wanted Baxter physically. Yet she had to marry and live forever with him following the social convention. Mariam-Paul relationship is a potential example of how tragic marriages come about because of feeling of duty that is socially induced. 'On one hand, convention dictates that physical passion where it exists and is being acted upon ...be legitimated in marriage,...On the other hand, conventional "wisdom" has it that marriage is not really the place for passion, and that a young man or woman should, if at all possible, marry for "higher" reasons' (Murfin 482). Neither Miriam, nor Clara is right for Paul, yet he feels that it is his duty to marry Miriam.

Eliot, in "The Waste Land", has portrayed people divided by nationalities. A woman in line no. 12 of "The Waste land", says, '*Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen echt deutsch*' (I am not Russian at all, I come from Lithuania). Lawrence, however, depicts people divided by class and accent. Lily Western is a character through whom Lawrence expresses many of his attitudes towards the social class system and stratification of speech forms which accompany it. Lily's dress and accent make the Morel family to serve and admire her. 'And yet she was not so grand' (Lawrence 134). She was a clerk in a London office. But she pretends to be a queen when she is with the Morel family. Lawrence clearly shows how class system creates a schism within a person. The values inherent in the system encourages a vain, weak, ambitious, and hollow girl like Lily to mimic the clothes, and speech of her betters, or rather 'To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' she makes herself well-dressed like Prufrock. However, in her endeavour to distinguish herself from those in whose society she was born, she divides herself also from the class into which she is to enter. The need of becoming two persons, while climbing up the ladder of society, is even suggested by the names Lawrence gives her – 'Gyp' suggests the gypsy like, uneducable darkness and wildness, while 'Lily' suggests purity, and superiority.

The snobbery and the romantic world, which an idealistic work of art generates, results in communication gap. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Prufrock is afraid of meeting the ladies for they very casually talk of 'Michelangelo'. Eliot insisted on poet's incorporation of more complexity and variety in his poem to 'become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning' (SE 289) to depict complexity and variety of civilisation. In *Sons and Lovers*, Mariam is abnormally in love with romantic literature and the *Bible*. As does Eliot parody

romantic texts, so does Lawrence points out the ill-effect of those texts. The internalisation of those texts creates the problem of divided self within Miriam. Indeed, she would not have hated her position as a well-bred farmer's daughter if she were not regularly reading about women being released from their 'rags of ...beggar maid' (Lawrence 161) to assume their legitimate places at the sides of Walter Scott heroes. In her wish of social climbing, she unconsciously cuts herself off from her class and posits herself far down in the class of the beggar maid. Her devotion to Christianity also cuts her off from reality. This makes her think of physical contact in terms of 'sacrifice' (Lawrence 302). She decides to 'submit, religiously' (Lawrence 302) if Paul insisted. Thus, the alienating effect of the highly fanciful texts from class and instinct is very well-illustrated in *Sons and Lovers*.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul, Polly, Pappleworth – all give orders to their subordinates. They just know that they have to get the works done by others irrespective of any consideration for the work condition of the employees and their basic needs. The fragmented, shifting and broken identity is thus focused by the different role playing among the same people to suit the demands of capitalism. The economic recession and capitalist exploitation fragment the workers and reduce them to working hands. This orderly disordered life is also depicted in the second part of "The Waste Land". A woman says, 'The hot water at ten/ And if it rains, a closed car at four'. People are guided by clock and command. Life is dislocated. There is no place for vitality or instinct. Being guided by machines and orders, people become puppets and lose their identities, and creativity. This mechanisation, as analysed through their texts by the authors, is generated by the estrangement from the vital forces of instinct, nature and primitive emotion. Both of the literary tycoons by suggesting the need for tradition as a remedy to the disorderly and anarchic life try to find an escape from the pathetic condition of humanity in the 'Unreal City' characterised by spiritual decay.

Incarceration is another keynote of both "The Waste Land" and *Sons and Lovers*. In the *Epigraph* of "The Waste Land" we find the Cumaean sibyl hanging in a jar. When the boys asked her, 'What do you want?' she answered, 'I want to die'. The sermon of the Thunder, 'Dayadhvam (to sympathize), makes the demons realize;

...I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

This very theme of imprisonment, confinement is also in *Sons and Lover*. Capitalist society imprisons people. Walter Morel is completely submerged in his debts for the money he had

borrowed for the purpose of purchasing of household furniture. Strangely enough, the moneylender bullies William and Paul instead of Walter. Even before Paul finds a job 'Already he was a prisoner of industrialism' (Lawrence 103). In Jordan's Surgical Appliances also we find people's true identity is denied. In the chapter entitled *Paul Launches into Life*, the scene in which the girls were singing together, 'stopped singing' (Lawrence 120) after seeing Pappleworth. His approach to the fanciful song "Two Little Girls in Blue" is remarkable. He asks them to make a bit less noise for people will think that they keep cats if the girls continue to sing. Such kind of panoptical watch and regulations make people feel like going crazy.

One finds remarkable similarity between Eliot and Lawrence in their use of thematised language. Lawrence's language in *Sons and Lovers* is refracted into heteroglossic diversity, he felt that the complexities of man-woman relationship demand one language, and the beauty of nature requires a different language. The difference of middle class Gertrude Coppard's pure English language with a southern pronunciation and working class Mr Morel's energetic and emotive dialect makes them curious about one another and fall in love at the first site. Though this is the same linguistic difference and class difference which later make Mrs Gertrude Morel contemptuous of Mr Morel. While bringing out the discord of the Leivers family, the narrative voice speaks, 'And so they were unaccustomed, painfully uncouth in the simplest social intercourse, suffering, and yet, insolvent in their superiority' (Lawrence 163). This Latinate language reflects the lack of understanding among people. Eliot, too, made his characters use differentiated speech. In "The Waste Land", a woman says 'The hot water at ten'. Here, Eliot deliberately breaks the grammar, for broken language is the proper vehicle for conveying the brokenness of life. Since life is dislocated, language used to depict a heap of images of non-coherence of experience must reflect it.

However, in spite of all these similarities, Lawrence's vision of England in *Sons and Lovers* is not exactly Eliot's bleak vision of the modern day England as wasteland. Mechanisation, ennui and apathy did not take toll of whole humanity. The life in death existence, which makes Prufrock compare himself to dead Yorick when he speaks of himself 'almost...the Fool' was not experienced by the miners. In fact, in Lawrence's England, all was not lost. Even in such a situation, man like Walter Morel is not bound by working hour and doesn't stop working till he accomplished the undertaken duty simply because he loves to work. Although torn down by his wife's snobbery he never experiences boredom and terror communicated by the woman in 'A Game of Chess' as he never lost his passion, ethics and drive for his work. Thus, at least some of the characters in Lawrence's novel are not mere

effigies. As they choose to do something against nothing, they do exist. Marriage and normal love affair of Arthur-Beatrice, and Annie-Leonard exist side by side with the deadlock marriages of so many couples.

Lawrence and Eliot both lived in a time when the same technological advancement which was thought to be blessing in the form of agricultural revolution proved itself to be curse in the form of chemical weapon. Therefore, both the disillusioned authors searched a way out from such a desiccated, rationalized and mechanized situation. However, the path to salvation from the spirit of mechanism and arid rationalism suggested by Lawrence and Eliot are different. Eliot, on the one hand, draws allusion from other disillusioned poets such as Baudelaire and Dante and shows city as an eternally unreal space. He, just as Dante felt that redemption can be achieved only through spiritual path. Eliot, therefore, prescribes faith, and obedience to the sermons of the Thunder ['Datta' (to give), 'Dayadhvam' (to sympathize), and 'Damyata' (to control)]. Thus, his way out to achieve divine goal was that of reconciling to human virtues by discarding vices and embracing higher love forsaking lower love. Lawrence on the other hand, was overwhelmed by the demonic power and destructive potential of industry. He felt that wholeness of life can be achieved if men be intimate to nature and be guided by instinct. He, therefore, presents scenes of vital sexual relationship in which only the individual's ultimate, naked, innocent self and the self's ecstatic awareness of being in contact with the elemental life force and rhythms of nature remains. That is why Paul became not a man with a mind, but a great instinct while making love with Clara on the bank of the river Trent. His emotion was strong enough to carry with it everything, reason, soul, blood in a great sweep.

From the foregoing exploration of the thematic similarity it is evident that both Eliot and Lawrence were concerned with the modern crisis of man's estrangement from his deepest self, from his society, from nature. They both sought relief from the angst arising out of fragmentation and dislocation as Lawrence's novel just like Eliot's poetry 'hold valuable answers for the malaise afflicting contemporary civilization' (Idea of a Christian Society 48). Lawrence genuinely portrays the passionate struggle of the protagonists to get back to the primitive source of being, and their aim to recover the lost vitality, and unity of being. However, Eliot's proffered antidotes to the futility of human existence consists of 'a *respect* for the religious life, for the life of prayer and contemplation' [emphasis Eliot] (Idea of a Christian Society 48). It is this thematic similarity of being occupied with the troubles of alienation, dislocation, fragmentation, and concomitant blights of an era of broken spiritual

values as the zeitgeist of wartime crisis faced during early twentieth century, which creates the intertextuality and makes Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* look like an echo of Eliot's poetry.

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