



Malady of Modern Civilization In 'Wasteland' and 'Muktiprasang'

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ABSTRACT

All human civilizations have sprung with the combined effort and inspiration of great men. Ages may come and ages may go but human nature and human experiences culminating into human consciousness remains practically one and same throughout ages. In the same manner, the disintegration and decay of such civilizations can be attributed to human vanity and ambition resulting in loss of moral integrity. As literature is the mirror of life itself, it tries to give the impression of truth and in the modern times, such realist scenario came into being which was free from normative judgments and philosophical theories and rather tried to depict the life together with its harshness, sordid realities, and objective truth. In such an environment the exposure to poverty, violence, racism, inequality, filth, squalor, prejudice, corruption, prostitution, and disease cannot be overlooked. In such an environment, World literature tried to find a panacea by dwelling into human consciousness. Unsurprisingly, the continuum of the same can be understood through the comparative study of two major poems of two great poets of two different languages. The comparison is to be done between 'The Wasteland' of T.S. Eliot and the Mukti-Prasang by Raj Kamal Chaudhary.

The stark difference between these two poets ranging from the different circumstances but reaching to the same realities and crisis is that one poet and his work, *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot, has been so widely and globally read that it is no less than a challenge to write something new and unsaid, and the other poet and his work (or oeuvre so to say), *Mukti-Prasang* by Raj Kamal Chaudhary, has been so much ignored and marginalized deliberately that such ignorance is well taken as the basic notion of the language in which it is written and the culture it breathes in dwelling into the starved and dry soul of humanity, both the poems tried to question the bitter truth of humanity. Though the authors are placed in two different world cultures yet the human consciousness which reverberates within the human body is one and the same. The striking similarity between both the pieces originate after acceptance of death as eternal truth and acceptance of this body as fragile, brittle, and subject to decay as after this acceptance comes into being the new quest for real life, freedom, and independence.

Eliot, in order to represent the malady of the present-day civilization, chose the mythical method which helped him in the concretizing the present with the past showcasing the parallels and contrasts of the civilizations through the stream of consciousness of Tiresias, a person in whose consciousness unfolds the multiple layers of experience of man as well as a woman. Eliot writes in *The Wasteland*,

"I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between the two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts can see
At the violet hour..."

Eliot uses Tiresias as a spectator who is actually not a character but a link connecting various wastelands, the wasteland of King Oedipus as well as the contemporary modern-day wasteland. Nevertheless, Tiresias can be seen as the embodiment of suffering of humanity, of the human consciousness in whom all the sexes meet just as Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor, the Smyrna merchant having a pocket full of currants, and Ferdinand, the king of Naples, all merge in the consciousness of Tiresias in the same way the consciousness of female sex merges with him as told in the Fire sermon--

“I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest--
And I Tiresias have force suffered all”

Further, beneath all the shifting experiences of the females which entail the themes of desertion, violation of innocence, sex, and fertility as the sections of Wasteland proceed further, there is the presence of Belladonna, the lady of the Rocks who in the first section itself and where Madame Sosostriis, the famous fortune teller, picks the card up and prognosticates about future. Here, the Belladonna becomes any Lady of the present modern times. Identities merge in the proceeding sections where the female characters strengthen such acts of violation of innocence and morbidity in sex acts irrespective of their character’s names on the surface.

Striking similarity and resemblance can be viewed in ‘Muktiprasang’ when one’s consciousness strikes between the intense desire to be free from the pangs of birth and death and when the life spirit embalms one’s spirit to join the force of life. This struggle of consciousness is the major thrust of ‘Muktiprasang’. When the power of Indian myth is about to expire, one has to bear the decayed, torn, destructible, fragile, and acrimonious body of self just like the Omnipotent Shiva who has carried the body of Dakshkanya, Sati. Rajkamal Chaudhary, in order to portray this state of human body and consciousness, goes into striking details as a true realist into the limitations and possibilities of this caged bird who goes and comes forth as the village deity, social lives of contemporary city lives, and the current state of modern-day civilization, which is as decayed as the septic body just before the final moment, struck. But even in this crucial moment, the author is unable to dissociate himself from the destiny of humanity which can be seen in the lines given below:

“I must thank Him that only formless
For this ten headed destruction
If that flag post would have remained indestructible
Than I would have been seen roaming in past lives with no incidents at all
Finding my parentage and remembering fellow travellers of central hall
Together with my widows visiting Gangasagar
For public places
Holding the opportunist flags in the rallies of unequal’s
Carrying the impotent news of wars and weather reports
News of Vietnam, Hindesia, Congo, Rhodesia
Whether atom bomb will be made or not
Citizen gentle women
Having green, white, black umbrellas

Should use loop or atomic umbrellas instead”

Here, in both the poems there is a striking resemblance that the sense of self is a myth and if there exists a thing called ‘self’ it is constantly changing and evolving and nevertheless it is impossible to discard it or to keep it unaffected from the external conditions of human civilization. The characters portrayed by authors are imagined nameless, faceless, isolated, and neurotic. In *The Wasteland*, there is an extensive work of racial memory through the extended time approach and there is the intrusion of the central consciousness approach which pervades the poem from the very beginning. In the first section itself, the archetypes give an identity to the characters as there is the substitution of ‘corpse’ for the seed which starts in an abrupt conversation in the section symbolizes assimilation with the characters of the past. The passage conscious recognition gets derived from the unconscious recognition of another life of the past. The substitution of the corpse with the seeds hints at the mythical method of vegetation rituals of fertility, there is double consciousness of Stetson with ships at Mylae where the war between Romans and Carthaginians were fought.

“There I saw

one I knew, and stopped him, crying:

“Stetson!

“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

“Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?”

The same conscious self-derives identity from the unconscious identity of the past rather merging its identity to and fro from the various identities of the pasts in Muktiprasang. This consciousness of self is derived from the name of false God with masks. This false God is the demon Bhasmasur or decaying body of Duryodhan left to decay after the battle of Mahabharata or it is the soldier’s self which goes on to Korea, Cuba, Pakistan, Vietnam, Algeria.

“That God Bhasmasur, defeated in this Kurushetra

Duryodhan in my body’s unclaimed

Public Park

And/Either

In Vietnam Uri-Punch UNO Tibet Bastar Black Africa

He goes further to hit the target

On my heart on my head

That my soldier, my spy my God

Sent silently sometimes to Korea, Cuba, Pakistan

To Vietnam, Algeria

Sometimes for one’s culture, machines, tanks, ships, weapons

In order to control the prices during Odisha’s famine

Power assembly in Kahira for atom tests ban

Sometimes talks sometimes punishments

Sometimes in the name of Christ and sometimes for flesh”

The natural balance is displayed as a major requirement and if this balance is disturbed it definitely leads to the degeneration of morality as well as spirituality and corruption of society. Occurrences of *The Wasteland*

reflect this symbolically in the third section of the poem. The Fire sermon reflects the sermon of Buddha in which he mentions that the infatuation with the fire of birth, death, misery, youth ends up in grief, grief which burns up the Life, only this fire of lust can be overcome with the fire of suffering and pain. In the fire sermon, the fire of lust, corruption, and sexual perversion so rampant is brought out significantly. The pollution of the river Thames signifies the sexual perversion of the times as the scenes of vestiges of summer parties besides banks of Thames reminds this.

“The river sweats
Oil and tar”

The sounds of horns of motors on the bank of the river, every class of people right from the merchant class of Mr. Eugenides to sailors as well as fishermen all are indulged in sexual acts for cheap merriment and have forgotten the regenerative power of this. Even the common households in London pubs and public houses have the topic of adultery and abortion, forgetting the discipline in married life and among the many appetites sex has degenerated into one of the chief appetites whose gratification is atrophied of prime achievements forgetting its redemptive power. The chief motive and drive of the generation have remained confined to preserving youth for indulging in sex for hours and days till the death knock arrives as symbolized by the bartender repeated remarks--

“HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME”. –

-This is further signified by the episode of typist girl and her lover who has degraded the act to mechanical measures and the act is there for the sake of doing devoid of its rejuvenating power as she is glad that act is over now--“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.” Further, the act is compared to the act of mechanical automobile engine by the poet--

“When the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting”

Striking similarity can be met in part of ‘Muktiprasang’

“Smell of lights, ancient sound of flesh
Shapes of color, various shapes of bodily colors
Politics of body
Nothing is strange and more near to the politics than the politics of Body
Politics of poppy and cereals start up from here
Starts up from here that musk of Deer”

The consciousness of a man is unable to discern him from the fate of humanity as is evident by the consciousness of a man who is about to die and by the consciousness of humanity i.e. Tiresias. The crime of opportunity is seen on all the vulnerable sections of the society as presented by Eliot in the sections where he goes into the deeper details of the room of the lady of fashion may it be Belinda, Belladonna, Cleopatra, Dido where exquisite details right from the aroma of synthetic perfume to state of various cosmetics are described including the grandiose marble stone of the dressing place to the reflection caused by seven-branched candleholder reflecting lady’s jewels and flames. But in such an atmosphere the darker aspects of humanity are still remaining unanswered as reflected in the paintings of Satan entering the gates of Eden to lure Eve and the painting of Philomela which is proof of the untold suffering of a lady who was a victim of crime of opportunity by a king and whose pathetic song is a reminder of the barbaric rape forgotten by the

contemporary humanity as Elizabethan poets painted this picture in bad taste as the sound “Jug Jug” is only an act of sexual pleasure for them. Also, this sexual perversion is evident in the present situation of the daughter of Thames in Richmond, Kew, and Highbury where sexual crimes and sexual assaults are the matter of every day where their situation is expressed in the words of a survivor girl comparing herself to the broken fingernails of a dirty hand maybe the society itself which has gone so,

“On Margate Sands

I can connect

Nothing with nothing

The broken fingernails of dirty hands”

This presents a quite contrary picture of past when on the quite serene atmosphere of Thames roamed Queen Elizabeth together with Earl of Leicester. But the present situation is more near to the city burning with the fire of lust, city from where Saint Augustine wants refuge;

“To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest”

The chief reason behind using various myths is that due to this parallelism between the past and present we are able to figure out the continuity of past and present and bridging of gulf helps us in giving a concretized picture. Such mythical references occur in the conscience of Indian literature as well. As evident in Muktiprasang, there is a rich plethora of net of myths that weave an intricate design on human consciousness. The injustices and unanswered questions reverberate in them which seek justice for the oppressed social structures also presenting a continuity of the past structures with the present time but most striking are the counterpoint or counter perspective to established histories which gives voice to victim narratives thus giving them a larger platform. The same suffering voice of humanity can be heard as of Eliot’s Daughter of Thames as well as in the voice of Philomela, in the suffering female feticide going from ages as well as from cultivators, farmers, laborers flesh and bones:

“Right from Sita and Ahilya we have done all the feticides

From Demons, fireballs, moons, virgins

We have done Rakt tarpan by Brahmins and God

Used that bone of Dadhichi by the servants of Power

In streets, shops, offices, spaces of parliament

Chewing the bone like Dogs

They are our relatives have got our blood, flesh, sperm and diseases

By the hard labor for ten thousand years

We have made this warm wombed fertile earth willingly into a deserted place

In the porch of Manu Satrupa, the poison tree of Power

We have planted”

The universal quest for the meaning behind life, the search for the eternal question behind the birth, death, and usual business routines are asked by the soul of thinkers and philosophers as does Shakespeare in his masterpiece Hamlet

“What is man,
If his chief god and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast no more.

This Question and eternal thinking are presented in Eliot’s Death by Water section when the Phlebas a young and handsome businessman sailor is caught in the whirlpool and drowns which represents Objective correlative of the fate of humanity who dies without the quest for spiritual regeneration and is shown by the chain of events which reminds of this inevitable decay of modern civilization which cares only for food, shelter, wealth, living and the questions beyond them are irrelevant to them. Since death consumes all the humanity is subsumed by the common fate of birth, followed by youth and which finally culminates into death but still we remain ignorant of this fact till a large part of our life is lost “Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you” The same question which haunts humanity is seen being reflected in Muktiprasang too which lies in the base of things.

“Crowd, people charged with lathi, agitation, listener, spokesman, consumer
Don’t tell anything other than wheat
Let the Man make Moon his Colony
Let Man be free from God, Devil, and Laws of Righteousness
Let Man write Philosophy of absurdity
Let Man fetch in far stretched wild varieties interview of meditative plants
Let Man find thirty crore dollars from World Bank
Let the Man sell himself, His wife, his eyes, and his country
But the crowd talks of nothing else
Other than eating Wheat and sleeping on dirty mattress
In the dictionary of common people there is no other sentence
No other thoughts, no other issues
But even by remaining away from the crowd still can’t remain unrelated from them
To be Free from poetry and before death
To be free is Impossible”

Again and again, it is not possible to distance oneself from the pain, suffering, starvation, and death of humanity as a whole till then one is unable to attain renunciation, liberation, and lasting peace. The society of the modern urban civilization marred by rootlessness, the collapse of cultural, moral orders as both the poems deal with the world war and colonial period. The cities signify the same destruction and decay irrespective of their names. Industrialization and scientific achievements proved no good for society. Whether Vienna, Alexandria or London each had got the same story to tell as all of them were war-ravaged societies

“What is the city over mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal”

The same intensity can be felt in Muktiprasang when the consciousness of a dying man is unable to forget the scenario of crumbling world order and the future of peace talk initiatives of the contemporary World order:

“The name of the most naked and still strong woman of this world is Vietnam

East Vietnam and South Vietnam

White Africa and Black Africa

East Germany and West Germany

Pakistan and Hindustan

White America and Black America

Johnson’s America and Allen Ginsberg’s America

Indira Gandhi’s Hindustan

And Malay Rajkamal Chaudhary’s Hindustan”

Further, the modern man’s disillusionment of worshipping the same God and still struggling with its messages is quite ironic to look at. The enormous power wielded by politicians is frightening to look at. Even the peace initiatives are dyeing an untimely death

“Half body of Christ is seen hanging in Peking

The other half is in Moscow New York on a cross

And in rest of the cities

The joint statements written in the words of poets

In the hydrogen bomb experiments fluffing their wings

Die the death of doves”

The whole idea points out to the untold suffering to the people, directly and indirectly, people wandering in search of basic necessities and in madness for the loss of their near and dear ones is heart wailing. The picture of a woman mad with grief, sense of loss presented by both the poets is quite remarkable

“A woman drew long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strings”

While in other landscape the picture of starving humanity being cast in the form of a woman who goes on asking for food and water from structures of society that emerges from the loop of the democratic system and continue working on oppressed oppressor model.

“When the clock strikes Eleven fifty-nine under Saheed memorial a black female who goes naked with hunger

Stretches both arms under that deserted sky

Who cries there to sleep and begs from God’s of water and food”

The mechanical, constructed dead social environment is portrayed where there in buried libidinal life split between self-regarding consciousness and unconsciousness and there is a panorama of death in life itself, as in the very first section itself of The Wasteland there is a reference of Dante’s Hell which is now found in any city of modern-day--

“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

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet”

Even the postcolonial society of Rajkamal Chaudhary is not free from a mind-set that is unable to reason or question logically and is leading a libidinal lifestyle again having a split personality where the cold war atmosphere has outlived reasons.

“And in rest of the city’s Political prostitutes have made yellow dirty darkness

To outshine their body

There has remained no difference between Delhi and Dhaka, Karachi

There is no difference between one enslaved country and the other ones.

Flesh and Books and religious doctrines

All are sold at the same time and at the same rate

And the only hero left of the enslaved country is now

007 James Bond”

In the temporal sense the death, decay, disintegration, perversion of morals of society is slowly brought out through the realistic portrait portrayed which clears out how decadence brings decay. In the text of *The Wasteland* as we proceed from the heap of broken images from ‘The burial of the dead’ to ‘A game of Chess’ we come across the boudoir of a lady with exquisite details whose outer aura, grandness, and ambiance can match with either Cleopatra or Dido queen of Carthage but there is nothing stately about it. The lady signifies the combined racial memory of the situation of the class to which she belongs and that is the state of neurosis, bored libidinal state, and inner vacancy devoid of vitality and force of life.

“What shall I do now? What shall I do?”

“What shall we do tomorrow?

“What shall we ever do?”

“The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door”

Adding to this lifeless routine the state of decay is further enhanced by lack of communication between the dear and closed ones in the modern-day society as in the same section the lady tells her lover “Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.” This degeneration, filth, decay is compared with the condition of the decomposing body encompassed in the lines of the companion of the lady of ‘A Game of Chess’ being said when he is compelled to think- “I think we are in the rats’ alley

Where the dead men lost their bones” The same intensity of disintegration of consciousness and its melting and merging consciousness of the hermaphrodite scholar of the Greek civilization can be heard in the ‘The Fire Sermon’ where he emerges according to shifting references Prince Ferdinand, Hamlet, Claudius, various unnamed kings of the vegetation rituals who combine and merge with the

present world’s malady- “But at my back in a cold blast I hear/The rattle of the bones and chuckle spread from ear to ear”

The same intensity of feelings can be felt in Muktiprasang when Rajkamal Chaudhary compares the degenerated body of a person going to die with the corrosive, corruptive, filthy atmosphere of the contemporary situation of the section who are oppressed—

“But before opening up of my country my bladder my intestines

Surgeons must know

Everywhere there is not water or blood or flesh

Or soil

On most of the places in this country, there is air, worms, wounds, and sewage water

Where veins have ruptured by decay there even there is no air

When the upper skin gets torn there will be neither fire nor smoke

Extreme hunger ...like forest's fire

All have cooled off after the night of fifteenth August

Now there are ashes and ashes yellow puss”

In the last section of *The Wasteland*, Eliot has many wastelands in his brain and he connects the modern-day wasteland to the wasteland of the Fisher King, King Oedipus of Thebes, and the Biblical wasteland whose reign were known for the severe drought and bareness due to sexual perversion of their rules. Only when the virtuous knight Sir Parsifal went to Chapel Perilous then the only curse of the land was removed. There is a comparison between the sickness of modern-day humanity and the sexual orgies of the Fisher king. Here images of the absence of even a drop of water and dryness suggest towards the spiritual decay of the times as water is regarded as a source of regeneration from ages—

“If there water we should stop and drink

Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think”

Eliot in order to find a way for the suffering humanity refers to the event of Indian history when the land was hit by drought and famine. In order to overcome, people sought divine intervention which was ratified as God's voice in the name of thunder who's Da Da Da held the panacea for the whole humanity which emphasized on the dedication of our lives to a useful cause, sympathies with the creation of God i.e. the philosophy of *Vashudhaiva Kutumbakam* and the will power to self-control. It is on this note of hope that Eliot ends *The Wasteland*. While the last section of Muktiprasang has been divided into eight contexts but they can be summed up as reaching to the final conclusion of the consciousness of a person who is between the state of life and death. Here emphasizing the realist and naturalistic details Rajkamal Chaudhary is of the view that even a dead human being can be attributed to having beauty in it as well as can ignite desires. Again with the myth of Ganges drowning her infants inborn, the poet dwells on the purpose, the significance of mortal human life and the immortal muse of poetry which is the purpose of the poet's life. One is reminded of the water imagery as in the last section of *The Wasteland*, which enhances the symbol of water as a purifier and its purgative values- “In the last, I have been born to enliven her in the Trishuli cave having the power of mantras” But even greater than the power of muse the poet considers the creative force of this nature supreme as in its unconscious meditative state it goes on creating life even after the untold barbarous acts of cruelty with it. Here the poet cuts a sorry figure if by stepping over the figurative details of places, times, and characters he has aggressed his limits. In the rest of the sections, there is a resemblance of striking magnitudes of the qualities of Daya, Dutta, and Damyata.

As in order to secure oneself, one goes on collecting innumerable items forgetting the dharma of humanity, the significance of fellow feeling (Daya) since we are unable to restraint ourselves (Damyata) in the absence of will power forgetting the divinity of sharing(Datta).

“Man dies first in the desire to protect oneself by creating walls over His body

Placing the earthen begging bowl forward and forward for wheat and warfare planes

Only a man free from desires even is in hunger nakedness and disease can be protected.”

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