

The Re-Appearance Of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land In The Times Of Covid-19 Pandemic

Shirsak Ghosh

*State Aided College Teacher, Department of English, Institution Name: Serampore Girls' College
ghosh.shirsak@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

In the world of COVID-19, things have turned topsy-turvy in the world and there is no hope for a scope of escape. People have to allow themselves to get in tune with the COVID-19 Pandemic symptoms. It turned a disastrous effect on the minds of human beings as they have to undergo tortures within themselves. At some point in time, we can relate to some of the turbulence and the afflictions of those depressed human beings in Modern English poets' work namely T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In this particular paper, the author describes some of the lines of the poem and connect them with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: - COVID-19, minds, time, turbulence and connect.

Introduction

First of all, we need to be aware of the fact about the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. It was published in the year 1922. We need to be aware of the fact after 100 years, the COVID-19 pandemic is still gaining ground in all parts of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic rose its epitome in the year 2020 and still it is not entirely cured which brings to mind the people's experience and attitude during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When World War I took place in different parts of the world, the after-effects of the war caused a huge effect on the minds of the people. They were hoping against hope for a better future; however, their minds are dejected and are affected by the affliction of the war. They were tormented within themselves and couldn't hope for a better future in this aspect. It was during this time T.S. Eliot had written the poem of *The Waste Land*.

In the COVID-19 Pandemic, a virus had started to explore from Wuhan, China. Slowly it tried to spread its wings in all the parts of the world making it difficult for the people in this world to stay in the comfort zone of their work. The world was tongue-tied to silence and everything switched over to work from home mode. Lockdown has been implicated in various and strict curfew was implemented in certain countries to avoid the commotion of people in the world.

"April is the cruellest month" – the first line from the first section of the poem 'The Burial of the Dead' in *The Waste Land* which is true in the COVID-19 crisis. During April, many English medium schools start their new session in India or some across the globe. School children are excited to come to school and enjoy their classes in their school and have time for their friends. Teachers also get delighted to take their classes from this new session of this month. However, COVID-19 had played a different role and students along with their teachers are stuck inside their homes. The traditional classroom has already shifted to the online classroom in this regard. Teachers do meet the students but students do get in touch with their friends but they miss the warmth and pleasure with which they use to share face to face during the traditional methods. However, it is a big challenge for teachers for teaching small kids in this regards Teaching apps like Google Meet, Zoom App and Skype are also been discovered through this new process of teaching offline.

In the bank sector, from April, a new session begins. Usually, banks are crowded with lots of people before the time of COVID-19. In this era of COVID-19, people also stand very less in number and there becomes a small queue through this process. Even some people are afraid to move out of the house. However, the bank officers have to earn their bread for their living and need to appear in the bank with COVID-19 norms.

April is a spring season and it is a sign of rebirth and regeneration. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, it begins with praising with the month of April,

"Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;"

During the onset of COVID-19, we human beings are trivial in comparison to the Supreme Soul. We can cast our vote of gratitude and prayers to Lord Almighty so that He may do something for the betterment of us. However, for, *The Waste Landers*, it does not have any effect if we pray to The Supreme Lord.

"Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,"

In the time of COVID-19 scenario, we human beings are fearlessly fearful as we are afraid at any moment of time anything could happen to us and this will hamper not only ourselves but those who are nearby to us and constant anxiety of COVID-19 stems around our mind every time. The people dwelling in *The Waste Land* are fearfully fearless. They are amiable in that cosy ambience of the wasteland and could not move out from that comfort zone.

"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

The above lines are quoted from the second section 'A Game of Chess' in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The conversation between the lady and a visitor who happens to be in love is the basic point in these lines. The lady is in a dilemma as to why the lover is not responding to her speech. She tries her level best to let her beloved speak and think about. The conversation has no significance in this particular context. Both of them seem to speak in trifles as if they are in a dream. The following quote also reminds us of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It is of Lucky's point of gibberish thought when his hat was taken away. Lucky's speech does not have any meaning though his entire speech is gibberish.

Concerning for the context of COVID-19, if a closed one die and his or her associates are asked to speak or think just at that moment, some people could be at wit's end and could not make two and two together and thus making the conversation

gibberish. If continuous force or pressure is put into the person's mind, unfortunately, things could take a different turn and it could turn up to be chaotic at some point in time.

"Nothing again nothing.

"Do

"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

"Nothing?"

The lines are from the second section 'A Game of Chess' in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The conversation takes place between the lady and a visitor who happens to be a lover. The lady asked the lover whether he knows anything, sees anything or whether he remembers anything about the noise and what the wind is doing.

The following quote also reminds us of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The whole play can be described in the words of Estragon's speech, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (*Waiting for Godot*, p.71).

Concerning to COVID-19 scenario, many of us still turn deaf ears relating to the adversities of the COVID-19 crisis and take our life for granted. People do not wear masks when they move out of their homes, nor do they sanitise their hands and take proper precautions leading others' life to be in danger along with them. Many of the people needed to be taught awareness about the dos and the don'ts about this pandemic. The hardest question arises despite of knowing all these symptoms how and when could they learn the right way?

"HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME"- In the COVID-19 scenario, when the family members are eager to look at their well-wisher's dead body. Someway or the other if they take some more time to pay a tribute in front of their dead boy, they have to undergo this particular message. It's disheartening as some could not see the dead body of their dear ones for the final time but that's the harsh and brutal reality.

"By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,

Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.

But at my back in a cold blast I hear

The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear."

The section begins with the opening of 'The Fire Sermon'. One should seek earthly possessions also a title from Lord Buddha's 'The Fire Sermon'. By the above lines, T.S. Eliot wanted to voice out that River Thames which was once holy and sacred is now polluted. It had lost its magic and spiritualism which it used to had because of the people.

In the article, 'COVID-19: India's holiest river is swollen with bodies', The River Ganges is swollen with dead bodies near Uttar Pradesh.

"A journalist in Prayagraj said he believed that many of the bodies were either Covid patients who died at home without a test, or poor people who couldn't afford a cremation."

"It is heartbreaking," he said. "All these people were someone's son, daughter, brother, father and mother. They deserved some respect in death. But they have not even become part of the statistics - they died unknown and were buried unknown."

"Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

Burning"

The third section, "The Fire Sermon" of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* ends with the futility of man's struggle in the human world. In the article, "Indian coronavirus: Round-the-clock mass cremations", Indian happened to see COVID-19 cases more than in any other country. At an open cremation ground, many dead bodies are cremated by their dead bodies at Delhi. "Burning" arouses a sense of awe and fear in all these people. Burning dead bodies around the globe causes an image of terror and fear to the common people across the globe.

"The first two scholars who attempted to date the *Waste Land* manuscripts, Hugh Kenner and Grover Smith, agreed that the principal question was the problem of the typewriters- three of them, to be exact. One was especially distinctive: its characters were discernibly larger than those of the others, and, as Valerie Eliot noted that it had been used with the kind of "violet ribbon used by Pound" (TWL:AF, 63), both the critics have inferred that this machine was Pound's. Eliot must have worked on it by visiting him in Paris in January 1922, they reasoned, and it had been used to type fair copies

of part IV and V of the poem because these were apparently the last to be drafted and had still not been typed when Eliot came to Paris." ("UA", 24; "MOTWL," 131)

- (Revisiting the *Waste Land*, 1, 3)

"A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell

He passed the stages of his age and youth

Entering the whirlpool."

The fourth section, "Death by Water" of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* talks about Phlebas, the Phoenician who died a fortnight back. The undercurrent of the sea "picked his bones in whispers". As he rose and fell among the waves, he passed the stages of old age and youth till he was swallowed by the whirlpool of death.

In the article, 'COVID-19: India's holiest river is swollen with bodies', many people who are poor cannot afford for a cremation. The corpses are floated in The River Ganges. River Ganges whom we wonder and pray as holy and sacred become polluted in this way.

"What is rare is that so many are turning up in such a short time, and in so many places along the river bank. A journalist in Kanpur told the BBC the corpses were evidence of a "massive discrepancy between the official Covid-19 death figures and the actual numbers on the ground".

"He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying

With a little patience"

The final section, 'What the Thunder Said' is proclaimed by thunder for the liberation of society from spiritual barrenness. It is the best time in the world to evoke spiritual awareness in the society. Just like the people living in *The Waste Land*, the people living in the COVID-19 scenario are spiritually dead. They are dying slowly and gradually from inside.

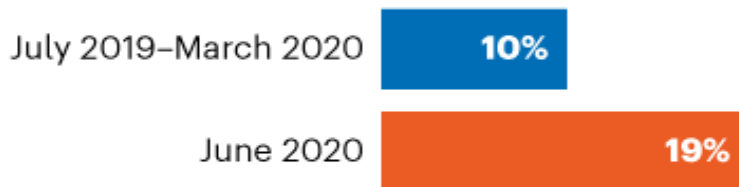
In the article, COVID'S mental health toll: how scientists are tracking a surge in depression, there is a chart that describes the UK and US adults reporting symptoms of depression before and after pandemic

COVID'S MENTAL STRESS

The percentage of people experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety has surged amid the COVID-19 pandemic, data from nationally representative surveys show.

■ Before pandemic ■ During pandemic

UK adults reporting symptoms of depression



US adults reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression



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Source: Office for National Statistics (UK data); Centre for disease control and prevention.

Eliot refers to the words “Da” “Da” “Da” in the poem *The Waste Land* that contains the secret of man’s spiritual rebirth in *The Waste Land*. Dutta (to give), Dayadhvam (to sympathize) and Damyata (self-control) are extremely necessary for spiritual achievement. “Shantih shantih shantih” ends with the 422 lines of the poem. Peace will come in the end and we shall overcome with hope and exhilaration.

During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, a writer Suresh Pattali, wrote “Revisiting ‘The Waste Land’ by T.S. Eliot in times of Covid” and brought about the ins and outs of the poem through his artistic work. Many motivational speakers are awaking us not to get disheartened and not to lose hope during this tough situation. Spiritualism can be the keynote for this process of curbing our mind and soul.

“With survey responses coming in at a rate of one every 20 seconds, we get information about how people are responding psychologically and socially to the pandemic in real time, and see specifically how it’s changed in response to things like new government measures coming in, or lockdown measures being eased,” says Fancourt.

Thus, COVID-19 would sometimes move away from our world to make it a better place. There are still some human beings who tirelessly work for themselves especially health care workers who do not get any holidays as per our normal days’ schedule. For everyone God would show mercy and for COVID-19 in the words of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* “show fear in a handful of dust”.

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