



RE-ASSERTION OF INDIAN AESTHETICS IN THE CRITICAL WORKS OF T.S. ELIOT

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Abstract:

The poetics of India and West has always been a debating issue in the sense of its comprehensiveness and profundity. Since the development of English language in India, the Indian poetics and knowledge traditions are shaped and dominated by Western scholars. However, they have been highly inspired by the deftness of Indian sacred scriptures. Indian scholars were competent enough in dealing language problems in a very comprehensive manner. The Indian aestheticians understood the language of literature in their own ways: Bharata as *abhinaya* (histrionic representation), Bhamaha as *alankāra* (figure), Vamana as *riti* (phrasal organization) Ānandavardhana as *dhvani* (suggestion), Kuntaka as *vakrokti* (obliquity) and Ksemendra as *aucitya*. These were the reasons that these Indian scholars achieved worldwide fame and recognition. In English literature, T.S. Eliot absorbs the Indian spirits and give expression to some of the peculiar traits in novel ways, making the principle of literary criticism applicable to contemporary literature and bearing relevance to all types of literature of all ages. This enchantment of Eliot for Indian philosophy and classical Indian literature explains the surprising similarity between the thought-current projected by him in some of his literary and non-literary works and the thought-current floated by Indian aesthetics in selected areas. For escalating better understanding regarding the profundity and mystery of Eliot's thoughts, these classical Indian theories prove as trailblazer. This paper is a modest attempt to decipher how Eliot's critical works are impregnated with Indian critical theories.

Key Words: *abhinaya* (historic representation), *alankāra* (figure), *riti* (phrasal organization) *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (obliquity), *aucitya* (propriety)

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Indian critical theories are profound in nature. These classical theories are extremely significant in bringing refined analysis of language. Indian poeticians not only developed the properties of language but also defined compositions of language. The history of *kāvya* in India is very wide and

comprehensive. And the poeticians of Indiadealt not only major issues but also minor issues related with poetics. They gave their own unique contribution in filling the gaps concerned with poetics. So it was the tradition that brought changes in certain intervals in every walk of life in general and in literature in particular. Eliot widely discusses about the immense role of tradition in shaping the ground of literature of any country of the world. He establishes in his essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” that “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.” (Eliot *Sacred Woods* 43). Indian tradition of poetics is so congruous and profound since it started from Bharatmuni and ended down to the Pt. Jagannātha. One of the chief features of Indian tradition is that the later poeticians glorified the creative use of language of earlier aestheticians by giving additional charm and maturity. The purpose of literature for them is not to entertain the readers but to connect it with them as the indispensable realm of human life. Eliot’s intention was quiet similar with them. He acquired knowledge from different sources. In this process of gaining knowledge, he was highly inspired by Indian knowledge tradition. He enumerates in *After Strange Gods* that,

Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after- and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys. (Eliot 40)

The concept of language that Eliot suggested is very close to Kuntaka’s concept of *vakrokti*. Eliot says: “The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning” (Eliot *Sacred Woods* 65).

Ācārya Kuntaka proposes the ‘suggestive use of language’ in his magnum opus *Vakroktijīvitam*. Kuntaka made emphasis on the creative use of language which is the essence of *vakrokti*. In modern terminology, *vakrokti* has been translated as obliquity. It is a striking feature of language that provides power in language. But Kuntaka asserts that mere *vakratā* is not sufficient in itself in shaping the proper form of *kāvya*; it must delight the mind of the reader who is responsive to the true beauty of poetry. The touchstone of *vakrokti* is its contribution to *camatkāra* (extraordinary delight), a kind of unique pleasure, experienced by the reader. Kuntaka calls it *lokottaracamatkāra*. The beauty in literature does not reflect only in using common usage or use of *nitānta*. Both the *vakrabhidhidheya* (oblique meaning), and the *vakraśabdoktiḥ* (oblique phrasing), are considered desirable for creating beauty in poetry. The approach of Eliot seems very much close to Kuntaka when he supports in his essay “Andrew Marvell” that: “we are inclined to infer that the suggestiveness is the aura around bright clear centre, that you cannot have the aura alone” (Eliot *Selected Prose* 169). According to him, innovation in poetry does not come only through meaning of the word that is employed in a work of art. For a reader it only serves certain purposes. He claims in his essay “The use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism” that: “The chief use of the ‘meaning’ of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be to satisfy one habit of the reader” (93). Therefore, meaning is not solely responsible to satisfy the readers intention but other dimensions

of literary works should also be focused.

Indian aestheticians make an analysis of tradition in the context of its relation with the poets as Eliot makes a conspicuous reference to tradition with genesis of poetry. Indian poetics reckons that Tradition or *parampara* is a bundle of thoughts obtained from accumulated experience and handed down from one generation to another generation. In the progress of continuation of our tradition, the unceasing ideas and notions of earlier poeticians are profoundly used by later critics and poeticians. In this process, they add the flavour of knowledge by expanding these theories. Bharat's theory of *rasa* is tested by critics like Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Śaṅkuka, Bhaṭṭanāyaka and Abhinavagupta.

Ānandvardhana makes it clear that, the facts of life presented long back by literary artists of hoary past, can be handled successfully by the literary artists of today, provided they are in the position to present successfully the excitants, the ensuents, and the permanent moods necessary for depiction of emotional moods (*rasa*). Ānandvardhana declares that when a specimen of literary art becomes successful in presenting emotional mood, and when this mood absorbs the total consciousness of the appreciators, the past ideas and notions appear fresh and charming. Now this kind of endeavor inspires the readers by its greatness and sublimity. He draws the parallelism of the trees acquiring freshness in spring. He versifies:

*dr̥ṣṭapūrvāpihyarthāḥ kāvya rasaparigrahāt/
sarvenavāivābhāntimadhumāsaivadrūmāḥ// (Ānandavardhana 293)*

(Just as the vigour of the spring imparts freshness to the old trees, which shine once again in their foliage, similarly the brilliant technique of the literary artist in presenting the emotional mood, inducts freshness to the old themes and incidents)

When Ānandvardhana makes this declaration that the aim of a literary artist is to make the reader acquainted with the permanent moods and emotions, likes and dislikes the inclinations and inspirations he means those of the nation or community, as a whole. This concept of Ānandvardhana finds a close similarity with the concept of historical sense as projected by T.S. Eliot under the umbrella term 'tradition'. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" projects:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.... This historical sense, which is sense of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (Eliot 43-44)

Eliot further adds: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value them alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism". (Eliot 44)

According to Abhinavagupta, it is not only the *āśrya* or *viśyālamban* but also the *bhāva* which is universalized, that means freedom from personal associations or emotions. Personal involvement is responsible for the elements of pleasure and pain in an emotional experience and when there is no involvement, these elements of sensuous pleasure and pain also disappear. Eliot manifests the theory of 'depersonalization' in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in twentieth century but this concept had reverberated in Indian poetics long ago. According to Indian poetics, in the process of literary creation and literary appreciation, personalities are to be rendered submissive, because where personality gathers prominence, poetic process does not complete itself.

Eliot, emphasizes the utility of 'tradition' in most of his critical works and remarks that it is the 'mind of the nation' that makes the poets creative. He gives the expression to the idea that the poet is required to surrender himself completely to 'tradition' and 'the mind of the nation'. In the process of creating good poetry, self-denial and 'depersonalization' are indispensable elements. Indian aestheticians promulgate the concept of tradition and also accept its connection with the mind of the nation. In order to keep literary creations free from the defects of obsolescence and repetition and creating the novelty of expressions, they develop certain techniques which are to be adopted by the artists in order to impart freshness to their literary creations. Eliot also asserts that, "novelty is better than repetition" (Eliot *Sacred Woods* 43).

Like Indian poetics, Eliot shapes a vision of poetic creation in order to develop poetic faculty. He proposes in his essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent'.

Great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever : composed out of feeling solely...The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together. (49)

According to Eliot, great poetic creations are the fusion of poetic elements as; imagination, feelings, emotions etc. These poetic elements are sufficiently active at the time of creation of poetry, because it is this faculty that makes it possible for the poet to utilize the function of suggestion and induct eternal charm into his poetry. Indian poetics define poetic process in a very conspicuous manner:

1. Mammata promulgates that imagination serves a unique role in creating any kinds of creative works. It is the first equipment used by a literary artist. Imagination does not reveal only totality of experience but also words and metres, figures and dictions suitable for composition of the desired poetic texture.
2. Rājasekhara opines that the power of imagination is so strong that it could not be better illustrated without bifurcation of its role for a trained literary artist and for connoisseur. He says, while the former supplies expression and contents, techniques and styles, indispensable for creating poetical opus, the latter enables the reader to feel his oneness with the artist. It is the feeling of oneness that contributes essentially for attainment of poetic experience.

3. Jagannātha, also emphasizes role of imagination in developing poetical creations. He explains the faculty of imagination as a faculty which presents expressions and contents favourable to the creation of the poem, competent to give expression to the complex unified experience and feeling of the poet.

Eliot's views are very much similar with those of Indian poetics, when he defines role of imagination in developing poetic faculty. Fortunately, he follows the concept of imagination of Jagannātha's 'unified experience' in the composition of poetry. According to Eliot, imagination is not created in isolation; it is the outcome of years' ardent labour and commitment. In his essay, "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism", Eliot says: "And of course only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood"(Eliot *Selected Prose* 91).

The relationship between the stated and suggestive meaning forms the core of the central poetics of the *dhvani* theory propounded by Ānandavardhana. One of his precursors, Udbhaṭa, has explained that the essence of poetic language is the secondary or metaphorical function of words. Ānandavardhana puts a different opinion. Since all languages are metaphorical, he says, the source of poetry must be another sense or value different from the primary (*abidhā*) and secondary (*lakṣaṇā*) one:

Poetical meaning is different from conventional meaning. In the words of great poets, it shines out and towers above the beauty of the well-known outer parts even as charm does in ladies. (*Ānandavardhana* 4)

Like Indian poetics, it has been widely accepted by the Modern Western critics that the creative use of language is the integral element of poetry. It always maintains the charm of a work of literature. Cleanth Brooks, a leading pioneering figure of modern criticism and counterpart of Eliot, who wrote a book *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) maintains a view, "it is a language in which the connotations play as great part as denotations" (Das 289). In this book he admits that the dictionary meaning of the words which the poem is made by, all type of rules of grammar and syntax do not lead anywhere close to the original meaning of the poem, because real meaning is hidden behind different types of irony, paradox, tension, ambiguity. Cleanth Brooks makes his opinion very concise when he utters that "paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry" (Das 287). Though, Indian poetics did not use sophisticated terminology as modern critics use in their works, but they perform a very significant role in providing the structure of Indian poetics which is still prevailing in more sophisticated manner. Cleanth Brooks did not pour out an innovative idea. His opinion is very much similar to Ānandavardhana:

The poetic meaning is not understood by a mere learning in grammar and lexicology. It is understood by those who have an insight into true essence of poetry. This (suggested) meaning and that rare word which possesses the power of conveying it, must be studied carefully by those who wish to become true poet. (7-8)

Ānandavardhana, classifies poetry into three sections, these are; *uttam* (best), *madhyam*

(intermediate), and *adhama* (inferior). He holds that the basis of his classification is predominance of the suggested sense over the expressed idea. Eliot in his “Three Voices of Poetry” maintains the similar scope with Ānandavardhana. According to him the poet is supreme who gives priority his own creation and talks about himself. The poet gives the value of audience or reader in the second voice. Similarly in the third voice, characters speak in verse where they talk about another imaginary characters. When Eliot talks about the first voice that is the voice of a poet, in such case a poet becomes very much neutral or impersonal without thinking about his surrounding atmosphere mainly audience. According to him a poet exhibits his emotions and ideas being impersonal and creates aura of suggestion.

Eliot discusses the concept of utility of poetry in his essay “The Use of Poetry and Use of Criticism”. Here he debunks the doctrine of “Art for art Sake” by saying as a mistaken theory, which is more advertised than practiced. Poetry delights us to a great extent but apart from it, it has a social utility. He says, “The poet is much more vitally concerned with the social ‘uses’ of poetry, and with his own place in society.” (Eliot *Selected Prose* 92). Here Eliot develops a humanistic approach like Indian poetics. They speak of six-fold purposes of poetry, including material wellbeing, attainment of good counsel and experience of blessedness, springing from aesthetic realization, but at the same breath they say that, the crestmark of all purposes is represented by attainment of supramundane delight arising from experience of *rasa*. In explaining this concept of *rasa*, Indian poetics project the idea that it consists in manifestation of bliss, which constitutes a part of the man’s being, and therefore, in repose of the soul in its own self.

Indian poetics glorify poetry by using linguistic features from various dimensions. For them only ‘meaning’ is not significant property rather certain other linguistic features serve in making a composite model. Rājaśekhara, a great Indian poetician and writer of *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* put emphasis on *kāvya* as sentences characterized by *guṇas* (specific properties) and *alankāra* (figural mode). Sentences are the amalgamation of *padas* and a *pada* is an inflected form, a duality of sound (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*). Rājaśekhara mentions that all the literary composers derive their ideas and viewpoints from diverse range and well-known source. He serializes these remarkable sources and suggests that ideas in a literary composition can be analyzed for their sources: history, myths and legends, sociological texts, texts of culture, viz., the Bible or Vedas, philosophical systems, theoretical texts of politics, economics and arts, actual life experience, literary compositions that already exist in the community, parallel arts and crafts—such as pottery, music, dance.

Eliot also posits a number of abilities or attributes that go to make a work of enduring value, abilities in choice of words, in framing of right sentences, in picaresque and fragmentary images, esoteric symbols, life experiences, mythical references, figures of speech, and in creation of desired state of mind. The music performs a very significant role in Eliot’s composition. He expresses a great importance to the music in poetry and affirms that a perfect system of music is as much necessary as the grand nature of the meaning for evocation of emotive experience in the mind of connoisseur. This means that the literary artist is required to master the art of handling

rhythm and metre in the specimen of literary art, so much so that the language of the poem itself becomes able to produce emotive experience corresponding to that of the literary artist in the mind of the appreciator. So far as this capability to handle rhythm and metre in the proper way is concerned, Eliot arrives at the study of metrical compositions that trains the ears and imitation of great literary artists who have gifted certain grand musical poems of humanity. When Eliot speaks of imitation, he does not refer simply to the cold-blooded imitation of a style of a particular literary artist, but to the deeper imitation of the mind of the artist, which is responsible for the genesis of metrical compositions, rendered enchanting by flow of flawless music. According to Rājaśekhara, music, art and dance play an inevitable role in designing a composition. Eliot also categorically agrees with him and observes that music of poetry does not only delight us but it also brings various cultures together. And that sort of amalgamation produces a very congenial atmosphere. He asserts in his essay, “The Music of Poetry” that:

English poetry, is a kind of amalgam of systems of diverssource: an amalgam like the amalgam of races, and indeed partly due to racial origins. The rhythms of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Norman French, of Middle English and Scots, have all made their mark upon English poetry, together with the rhythms of Latin, and, at various periods, of French, Italian and Spanish. As with human beings in a composite race, different strains may be dominant in different individuals, even in the members of the same family, so one or another element in a poetic compound may be more congenial.(Eliot 109)

He refers to aesthetic experience that a reader has when he interacts with a literary composition in any of the various ways, and mentions *rasa* theory as an adequate structure to account for this. According to him, *rasa siddhānta* is the widely accepted and discussed theory in Indian literary tradition. In terms of evaluation, Rājaśekhara promulgates that philosophical poets are three kinds: (1) The poet who composes a new philosophical treatise (*śāstra*), (2) a poet who builds literary elements into a comprehensive philosophical works, and (3) a poet who includes philosophical ideas in his literary composition. Our Indian tradition is very rich in terms of producing philosophical poets of first category, here numerous philosophical documents have been written by versatile writers. But in the West, T.S. Eliot such a great artist and thinker-poet of the modern age who not only discusses the problems but also provides solutions to his readers by bringing the philosophical texts into centre. Hence, he touches the second and the third categories of poets as suggested by Rājaśekhara. Eliot’s art of compositions are the amalgamation of manifold of philosophical ideas, history, myths, cultures etc.

Thus, there is a close resemblance in the thoughts of ancient Indian poetics and the literary criticism propounded in the works of T.S. Eliot. Such resemblance reaffirms the conviction that ideas and inspirations in the realm of literature are not constrained by either time or space. Those, which arise one corner of the world, find resurgence and assert themselves in a different corner even if repeated by many centuries and in the continents.

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