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The Aesthetic Value of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land: A Study in Light of Kuntaka's Theory of Vakrokti

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Poetic language is essentially different from the language of prose. When a poet struggles to express his inexpressible perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, he uses language in many noble ways. He arranges and rearranges language in unique patterns of sounds, syntax and diction to communicate his feelings to his readers. By using various poetic devices such as meter, rhyme, figures of speech, imagery, the poet instigates the production of strikingness expressions in the reader. Through this the reader transports in the world of literature. In the domain of literature and poetics, India has very rich tradition. In Indian poetics Ācārya Kuntaka proposes the 'suggestive use of language' in his treatise *Vakroktijīvitam*. The literal meaning of 'vakrokti' is crooked or indirect speech. In the context of poetics, it is unique utterance, transcending the common modes of speech and integrated with charm. According to 'vakrokti-Siddhānta', the beauty of poetry lies in the strikingness of expression which is soul of poetry.

The Sanskrit ācāryas like Bharata, Bhāmaha, Dandina, Vāmana, Ānandvardhana and others, who analyzed *vakrokti* in their own ways, recognized it is an independent poetic figure. To them, obliquity is the essential distinguishing feature of poetry. But Kuntaka was highly cognizant of the problem of poetic expression. He mustered courage to blaze a new trail of critical appraisal and proclaimed *vakrokti* to be the life of poetry. He defined *vakrokti* as '*vakroktirāiv vaidagdhyaḥkṛtā uccayate*'. That is to say, an utterance, characterized by wit or ingenuity is '*vakrokti*'. Krishnamoorthy Writes, "vakrokti is not just an out of the way expression or poetic turn; it is the masterly art underlying every element of poetry and involving effortless and spontaneous transformation of the prosaic raw materials into things of consummate beauty"(59). Literature is strange, therefore beautiful. It is strange because there is obliquity from what is commonplace, or other words, a slight exaggeration.

The hoary Indian Wisdom has attracted many intellectuals in the West. Scholars like, Emerson, Kant, Maxmuller and many more writers are produced fruitful works on Indian tradition and knowledge system. In modern literature T.S. Eliot is one of such writers whose works in Indian thoughts have asserted to a great extent. Especially poetry of Eliot is highly influenced by Indian Philosophy and language. T.S. Eliot categorically agrees with the theory of *vakrokti* with his concept of language. Eliot utters in his essay 'The Metaphysical Poets',

"Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. 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 5).

Kuntaka has classified *vakratā* into forty nine sub-varieties under six major heads, such as *varna-vinyāsa-vakratā* (phonetic obliquity), *pada-pūrvārdha-vakratā* (lexical obliquity), *pada-parārdha-vakratā* (grammatical obliquity), *vākya vakratā* (sentential obliquity), *prakarana-vakratā* (episodic or contextual obliquity) and *prabandha-vakratā* (compositional obliquity). In this way, *vakrokti* comes to embrace the entire gamut of the poetic art.

Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* can be applied as a viable critical tool to the T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land'. The present study attempts to analyse 'The Waste Land' in the light of Kuntaka's theory of 'Vakrokti'.

Let us first analyse the poem from the point of view of phonetic obliquity (*varna-vinyāsa vakratā*). In phonetic obliquity, similar or identical phonemes are arranged artistically in order to contribute to the high poetic charm to the expression. It has many sub-varieties like when similar or identical phonemes are repeated at varying intervals; when similar or identical phonemes are repeated without intervals. In the poem 'The Waste Land' T.S. Eliot used this type of *vakratā* many times in the course of the poem. In the fifth section of the poem 'What the Thunder Said' the fricatives enhance the beauty of visual effects.

There is not even solitude in the mountains.

But red sullen faces sneer and snarl.

In these lines the words are 'sullen', 'sneer', and 'snarl' engenders the additional charm in the reader and the visual images and precise representations of sound are evoked by rhythms to create a visionary effect. T.S. Eliot used this kind of obliquity not only giving the additional charm but changing the context also. He used another important example.

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down.

Let us see, in this line Eliot does not use any punctuation marks and whole sentence is written in continuous form that delights us with poetic charm. Through the repetition of words 'falling down', 'falling down', Eliot indicates the collapse of modern civilization. Besides the repetition of similar or identical phonemes at varying intervals and without intervals the poem has potent use of novel phonemes that removes the monotonous effect and beautifies the work of art.

The lexical obliquity the second variety of 'Vakrokti' functions through various sub-varieties in which a word in common usage is employed so as to include an attribution of associate meanings other than the primary meanings. There are many sub-varieties like obliquity of usage (*rudhi-vaicitrya vakratā*), obliquity of synonyms (*pariyāya- vakrata*), obliquity of transference (*upcāra-vakratā*), obliquity of adjectives (*viśesana- vakrata*), obliquity of concealment (*samvrti- vakratā*), obliquity of gender (*linga-vaicitrya vakratā*) and obliquity of action (*kriya-vaicitrya-vakratā*).

T.S. Eliot does not use all kinds of obliquities in this poem. But few of them he uses very artistically. The opening stanza of the poem evokes;

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.

Here the obliquity of fancied identification on resemblance concretizes the agony and suffering. Eliot attributes beautifully the inanimate ideas, objects into living one. Here 'cruellest month', 'dead land', 'dull roots' are personified. Thus in the above stanza the inanimate objects are conceived in terms of living objects. Eliot gets success in intensifying the monotonous tone by applying these phrases in the beginning of the poem. This treatment, undoubtedly imparts beauty to the expression.

Obliquity of adjective is (*viśesana-vakrata*), ironically used by Eliot. He delineates the true picture of modern England. In the first section 'The Burial of the Dead' Eliot remarks:

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
 With the wicked pack of cards.

Here Eliot artistically used adjectives; these are famous, bad, wisest and finally wicked. These terms are enough to predict the original personality of madam Sosostris who does not understand or explain the meaning what she sees. Through the adjectives, Eliot uses the suggestiveness in order to give the additional charm.

Another sub-variety of lexical obliquity which enriches the play is obliquity of concealment (*samvrti vakrata*). The purpose of the use of pronouns is to enhance the beauty of the object.

I think we are in rats' alley
 Where the dead men lost their bones.
 'What is that noise?'
 The wind under the door.
 What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?
 Nothing again nothing

In the above lines pronouns are 'where' and 'what' and repetition of the lines in varying intervals are contributing the meaning of the poem. The poet uses these pronouns to demonstrate the curiosity of the character that gives to the additional charm to the reader.

The grammatical obliquity is the third kind of obliquity. Kuntaka holds that it functions through tense (*kāla*), case (*kāraka*), number (*vacana*) etc. He defines grammatical obliquity is that when several forms of literary turns occur together in such a way to enhance the beauty of one another; they produce

artistic charm reminiscent of myriad faced beauty. The poet artistically uses present and past tense and through these tenses, he also indicates to future tense.

Ganga was sunken, and limp leaves

Waited for rain, while the black clouds

Gathered far distant, over Himavat.

The jungle crouched, humped in silence.

Then spoke the thunder

In the last section of *The Waste Land* the poet is hopeful regarding near future that spirituality, morality and positivity will bring the changes in this modern world. Use of grammatical obliquity is the key factor of the poem.

The fourth variety of obliquity is sentential obliquity (*vākya-vakratā*) which operates at the level of sentence. As it deals with the subject of the composition, so it is also called obliquity of subject matter which has two sub-varieties: imposed obliquity and natural obliquity. Kuntaka describes when the subject matter is described in a way conducive to beauty by means of exclusively artistic expression, we have imposed obliquity and when the subject matter is described in a way conducive to beauty by its own infinite natural charm, we have natural obliquity. T.S. Eliot is known as an intelligent poet due to excess supply of metaphorical words and figures of speech, in the poem. So the poem is devoid of natural obliquity. He employed a perfect example of imposed obliquity;

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

And dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And dry stone no sound of water.

In the above lines Eliot delineates the chaos and anarchy of the modern world through presenting the phrases, broken images, sun beats, dead trees and dry stones that are enough to personify the whole ideas in the figurative use of language.

The fifth variety that is episodic obliquity (*prakaraṇa vākratā*) lies in the treatment of the intended object which is capable of maintaining suspense all along and is the product of unique, boundless poetic skill, underlying it. The poem is rich with many sub-varieties except emotional utterance because under the impact of modern criticism, he negates personal emotion in the poetry. He evokes, "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Eliot 30).

The poem has universal appeal in the modified source story. Eliot makes the source story poetically striking by modifying it with predominant imagination. In his notes to '*The Waste Land*' Eliot acknowledged his debt to two works of anthropology: Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's '*From Ritual to Romance*'. Along with these books Eliot made the amalgamation of mythology and philosophy in his poem that he is stored from diverse sources as in Christian, Hinduism and Buddhism. Various analogies have been used to explain the structure and organization of the poetry.

Eliot used the obliquity of secondary episode. Through the opening line of the poem, he evokes:

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

That is his prelude, stating the anguished shrinking from experience. But while we read we are meant to think of another famous prelude:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote

The droghte of Marche with his shoures sote

And wathed every veyne in swich licour

Of which verth engendered is the flour.....

Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.

There is absolute contrast: the eager acceptance of experience. The reference of Chaucer at once releases a charge of feelings, which by contrast are entirely appropriate to what Eliot has to say. Nor is there any lack of tact, no sense of competing with Chaucer. The reference is so quit: it may ever have been unconscious.

The compositional obliquity (*prabandha-vakrāta*) is the last variety of *vakrokti*. Obliquity of intending end is one of the sub-varieties of compositional obliquity. The talented poet, in order to attain the excellence of another event, uses this device. Eliot's last section of the 'The Waste Land' titled 'What the Thunder Said' is a product of an event taken from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The threefold offspring of creator Prajapati for construction after completing their formal education. To each group he utters the syllable 'da'. Each group utters it differently. The Gods interpret it as 'dāmyata' (control yourself). The men interpret it as 'datta' (give). The demons interpret it as 'dayadhvam' (be compassionate). This event is the essence of the whole poem. Here Eliot exactly gets success in giving the conclusion of the poem.

Another sub-variety of compositional obliquity is, Obliquity of title. Kuntaka considers that the title of a work is also replete with a kind of obliquity. He holds that sometimes even a symbolic mark or name of the source story produces a remarkable beauty. The purpose of a good title is to unlock and underline the soul of the work; it enables the reader to know the main idea either of the ways- symbolic or literal. T.S Eliot's title of the poem 'The Waste Land' is impregnated with oblique meaning. The title very aptly conveys the idea of 'conflicts', 'tension', 'worry', 'agony', 'lust', 'immorality' etc. in the modern world.

In this poem, the use of '*vakrokti*' as poetic structure enriches the principal meaning of the poem. T.S. Eliot is a talented poet, he is very much aware about the creative use of language in poetry. On the basis of my assessment, T.S. Eliot categorically comes very close to 'Indian poetics' specially the theory of *Vakrokti*. This study serves the purpose simultaneously- the relevance of the Indian Sanskrit poetics in the contemporary English poetry in particular and poetry written in any language of the world in general from

the point of view of Indian knowledge and tradition with special reference to the 'Vakroktijivitam' as propound by Ācārya Kuntaka.

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