

# Crisis of Spirituality in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot

**Til Kumari Sharma**

Singhania University, India

Corresponding Author: Til Kumari Sharma email: [authortilkumarisharma@gmail.com](mailto:authortilkumarisharma@gmail.com)

## Abstract

*The article has tried to depict the spiritual loss in 20<sup>th</sup> century through the poem *The Waste Land*. Eliot seems very popular feature of the modern time. He was born in 1888 in America and died in 1965 in England. He is recognized as an American-English author of 20<sup>th</sup> century. His life had been nourished with many ups and downs of war time. He also had got complexities and tension in his life time. He left his nation for his survival. He has shown the crisis of modern time with his poem in which spiritual value is empty in everybody. Eliot's life comes with lone struggle. His verse has mirrored the culture as it is. It has depicted fashion, death, destruction, passion, sex-oriented love and kind less human heart. The inhumanity was big amount in modern time. No true heart was found there. The fashionable world with poor society had lost the dignity. The true love was nowhere. So the spiritual crisis seemed to appear everywhere. Modern period was ill by battlefield and lust. The people of society were not with kind heart and calmness. The time was born only with materialistic thought. As a result, the spirituality was in mist. This verse was composed by Eliot to show the crisis of spiritual world. So, crisis of inhumanity seemed in war time everywhere. The society seemed motionless. The life was in materialistic modern period.*

**Keywords:** *fashion, lust, passion, materialistic, survival, tragic, spirituality, crisis, war, death, destruction, love, modernity, losing, inhumanity*

## Introduction

T. S. Eliot as the prominent figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century seems very much talent to show the modern crisis in spirituality. He as the multi-talent of modern time has presented the tortured life of modern people due to loss of spiritual planting. The seed of spirituality was zero in modern time of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The people of modern time seemed less moral. The fashionable world could be seen through poem reading. At the beginning phase, the modern time was decorated with technological development.

The people seem to indulge in fashions and lust. One marriage seems nonsense. The sex-oriented society is seen. The war has broken the home and family members. The fearful and feeble mind is born everywhere. The darkness of creativity invites the modern generation. The boy seems like girl and girl seems like boy. The bias in identity due to

materialistic life seems there. Such loss of goodness is depicted through the poem *The Waste Land*. It is the huge evidence to show the life of modern period with lost love, danger, death and the apparent world.

The poem within five parts has portrayed death, spiritual crisis, grave, passion, fashion, evil society and so on. So modernity was fevered by lust and the apparent world. That has brought the emptiness of love and dignity. The love at that time is no more within heart and honesty. People tempt to body with wealth that has lost the sense of true love and brings the disaster of a peaceful world.

No peace in mind can be there. Only the death and destruction are prevalent everywhere. The security of fame, body, and mind is not seen in modern period. As a result, the crisis is seen and humanity is collapsed. Eliot as the prominent product of the modern era has composed the poem *The Waste Land*

as it is in the society. He has composed the poem *The Waste Land* in 1922 after 'First World War'. He has divided the poem in five components to show the modern destruction and decay. The article has focused on the words Spiritual Crisis in which dead people seem everywhere. The dignity of life is lost due to the war. These five components show the death, destruction, devastation, and crisis and so on.

Dealing with the meaning of crisis of spirituality, this research has brought the concept of dying. Eliot in his poetry has portrayed the destruction after "First World War" in 1914-1918. Due to the war, the beginning of modern world was diseased by spiritual loss. No unity was there. Individual alienation was prevailed everywhere.

Saltelli and Funtowicz (2017) state; "The root causes of the crisis include profound transformations of society and science's role in society" (p. 5). Here the line has defined "crisis" with huge change in culture, social rules and experimented world. It deals with the changing formation of social community to bring trouble and lack of everything. As it states that "crisis" comes with change of time and rules. The above words depict the impact of technology to change the social rules that may bring danger and complexity with it. The complexity has brought the loss and inhumanity in the world. The above line focuses on the changing status due to practical and reasonable "science" that has produced danger too. It lacks the dignity, unity, pleasure, joy and enjoyment.

### Historical Background of T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis Missouri, United States. He died in 1965 in England. His education career began from Smith Academy of America and B. A. from Harvard. He was candidate of PhD too. Eliot was influenced by W. B. Yeats, Shakespeare and Ezra Pound. When war was in great deal, youth moved to another country to have survival. Eliot also moved to France and Britain

due to the war. Then he is said as the figure of lost generation. In 1927, when he was 39, he took citizenship of England. In 1948, he got "Nobel Prize" in Literature from England. He was honored as huge English literary figure of England in 20th century. He is famous as American-English literary stand point in the world. He is known as poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, publisher, editor and novelist. It means he is dynamic in knowledge to write any genre.

He used to work in Faber and Faber publication. Eliot is most famous in his writing poems. His poetry very often displays the dark life of 20th century. He is really praiseworthy in personality of the modern period to count the subject of literature. Eliot as the real voice of modern time reflects the modernity as it is. He is the author in-between tradition and modern time. He focuses on his writing to deal with respect to tradition to have new innovation. So he respects the traditional literature. He is the person to come within the beginning of scientific rise and technological development. So very often, his works have observed society with its shortcomings and new innovations. He is the light of modern era. Anyway, Eliot is the known figure of modern period. He has composed essays, plays, poems and other literary genres. This research very often focuses on the poem especially on *The Waste Land* to show the spiritual crisis. He is in real sense, the hero of spiritual quality and quests the spirituality of modernism through his poem *The Waste Land*. One of many critics explains him as below.

"Another quality of Eliot's unconventional poetic technique, lies in his ability to use words to express his character's inability to communicate these words effectively" (Krupilnitskaya, 2015, p .4). One illustrates "Eliot" as the craftsman to use letters skillfully to separate from tradition. His way of expression shows the lack of people in poem to speak morally. This line presents the view that Eliot's persons in poem seem as disable people

to have moral quality. It is poet's modern style of writing with new innovation. The above line presents poet's innovative style to deal with people of modern period with their disable condition to bring good conversation. Poet's skill to use writing to show modern people with sick mind in his writing style is praiseworthy. Someone sees poet as never-ending figure in literature. It is Eliot's separate skill to show new approach in writings. His people speak with disability in his poem to show the modern society as it is. He praises "Eliot" as the distinct poet of modern period. Thus poet is voice of the modern time.

### **The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Time in Eliot's Poem *The Waste Land***

To know or understand the meaning of spiritual crisis, this research has to explain the meaning of it. Few critics have given the meaning of "What is crisis?"

Collins (1998) writes, "New Age spirituality is a response to this cultural and spiritual crisis" (p. 92). The line seeks the peace and light in the social disturbance. Collins has attempted to say that this society is harmful always. The war and conflict are emerged. The divine and holy places are lacked in society. The war with sex-oriented society is developed. In this time, he says the innovative time seeks divinity and purity in the world. The invention of time is referred as answer in this troublesome hour. He has innovative minute as the answer to established torture of society. But the quest of divinity in the troublesome time is a kind of seeking metaphysical world. He gives the priority of novelty of time to seek the meaning of divinity in the torture of world. So here Collins has favored his own time to seek peace in conflict.

Eliot is the huge memorable figure of modern time. He has composed many poems. Among them *The Waste Land* is very much popular to show

the modern crisis. His poem *The Waste Land* has divided in five sections in which he has presented misery of human life due to spiritual decay and these lines from the poem *The Waste Land* display spiritual crisis of the modern period.

The below lines from "The Burial of Dead" illustrate the lust of love and uncontrolled pain of love.

Eliot (1963, p. 54) writes,

- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I know nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence  
(37-41).

Here, the speaker says the memorable past love. One brings the memory of the partner when both were in meadow. The speaker saw the happiness of lover before. But later it seems depressed whether to live or die. One seems unknown and quiet. It shows tragic love of the couple that has kept both in ditch whether to live or loss. It explains the loss of spirituality in love of the modern time. These lines bring the bitter or sordid memory of past love that is not in presence. So these lines show the pretending love of lover that is real loss of true heart and love. In true sense, love is never dried when true hearts are united. But here only memory of meadow and physical praise can be read. That has brought the image of death to the beloved. So the decay of true love is frequent in the poem of Eliot.

The silence of the speaker in memory makes to die. So the love of physical entity invites always the decay of spirituality that has brought spiritual crisis. The lines have shown the theme of loss, and past memory brings disaster of mind. Those lines also have brought the tearful memory that brings death near life. Deception of love of the past memory

always brings the death of life that is the way of spiritual crisis in *The Waste Land*. The suffering of speaker to remember past lover brings the memory of painful life that makes sick whether to go or live. The dead life is there. Such kind of empty life is shown in these lines in which spiritual thinking and love seem zero. It shows the misery of life that brings torture and disaster of love.

The following lines from “The Game of Chess” show the spiritual crisis.

Eliot (1963, p. 58) composes,

When Lil’s husband got demobbed, I said-  
I did not mince my words, I said to her myself,  
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
Now Albert’s coming back, make yourself a  
bit smart (139-42).

Here, the above lines from the second part of *The Waste Land* display the dominant position of physical love. Someone orders the wife to be fresh and beautiful when partner arrives. To be beautiful in front of him seeks physical love that is sex-oriented love. That is not true love. True love seeks inner beauty and the quality of life that is not oriented physically. But these lines show the physical emotion to sex of couple. “Albert” seems materialistic hero that invites sex in love. The speaker is first person who says to beautify the physical fitness to satisfy her spouse. That has dismissed the quality of true love and it shows the spiritual crisis of human life in modern time. “Lil” is the wife of “Albert” who thinks that her partner disappears when she is not ready to him to have physical relation.

In reality, love does not only have physical lust. It seeks the spiritual freedom in true sense. But “Lil” seems to loss her man when she does not become beautiful to her partner. These lines have illustrated the crisis of spiritual love in modern time. The war has produced the people of lust and passion. There is

the lust of man to meet his wife otherwise he would not come to visit her. Her words speak herself to be ready to beautify for partner. The lines from second part of poem display the spiritual decay between the groom and wife relation.

Eliot (1963, p.62) writes, “She turns and looks a moment in the glass, / Hardly aware of her departed lover;” (249-50) The above lines from the third part of *The Waste Land* show the decay of true love where the beloved is left alone by her loved one. The responsibility of love by her sweetheart seems thoughtless that breaks the life of both. The girl seems depressed and turns to mirror thinking she is old. “She” seems aware to deception due to old age. The above poetic lines show the spiritual death of love in modern time. The quest of her boyfriend is for another younger love to fulfill his physical desire. The loss of love is another painful memory to beloved that “she” sees the physical desire of her boy and then he leaves her. The lines from the third part of *The Waste Land* as “The Fire Sermon” present of decay and death of love to loss spiritual quality.

When the people are living with material entity, the true love is no more there. Then separation will be there. Here, the lines’ illustration depicts the separation of true love due to modern materialistic life. The death of spirituality brings human crisis. That crisis of love can be found in above poetic lines. Her loved one seeks younger girl to love. But here she sees herself in mirror as old woman. That has brought the disintegration of love. To seek younger girl by her boy seems to loss spiritual love. The word “departed lover” hints to break spiritual love. So the spiritual crisis can be seen in these poetic lines.

The below are some lines from part five of the poem *The Waste Land* that express the death of alive people due to decreasing quality of spiritual life.

Eliot (1963, p. 66) composes, “He who was living

is now dead / We who were living are now dying” (328-29). The above words from “What the Thunder Said” depict the death of human life due to lack of peace and spiritual quality. The poet in these lines depicts the human being’s spiritual death though the body seems in movement. So, he sees the immoral human without ethical quality and moral life. He so composes the lines to show real death of human moral and mind. He presents all people with death of spiritual entity. The first-person pronoun “we” refers Eliot himself and others to live with unpleasant days where moral values are lost and people are surviving without meaning. The spiritual death is the real death of people. The poet in these lines explains about spiritual demise of people.

Dealing with the poem *The Waste Land* there are some critics who define the poem as below.

Lewis (1978) explains, “Eliot was probably amused by the variety of critical responses evoked by “Death by Water” (p. 86). Paul Lewis says that “Eliot” was really praised by many about the part of his famous poem *The Waste Land*. This poem’s part “Death by Water” has shown the demise as the emergence point to all humans. To be proud to youth is non-sense. To be strong will be declined one day. “Eliot” composes the power of dying as real victory of nature.

So, the human folly is nothing. Many critics have presented “Eliot” as real fellow to mention truth. One states that Eliot is entertained by other critics to read “Death by Water” that has illustrated the bitter reality of human destiny. He sees the comments to poet with positivity in writing “Death by Water.” He says that “Death by Water” gives real meaning of life that gives satisfaction to readers and their answers to Eliot may be entertainment.

“I chose to focus on *The Waste Land* because it seemed like a challenge, and because I had a vague idea, even before reading the poem, that the issues with which it deals must be worth analyzing” (Bedecarre, 2012, p.1). The line illustrates the verse *The Waste Land* as the revolt to time and it has uncertain or confusion to understand the meaning

though it is valuable to criticize. The critic above as the first-person pronoun expresses his belief about the poem *The Waste Land*. He has found uncertain or unclear view before looking the verse. But he has found value in explaining the verse due to its protest against modern age and destruction.

He has explained the poetry mainly to its protest against war and he finds unclear to its meaning too. Even there is uncertainty; he sees valuable point to criticize the song *The Waste Land*. The words confuse in its exact meaning but he finds valuable due to its protest to modern society. Someone as the critic of *The Waste Land* understands the clear protest against the injustice of war. So, he sees meaningful scenario to analyze this verse.

Lehman, (2009) illustrates, “Satire, at least during Eliot’s composition of the early drafts of *The Waste Land*, initially presented itself as a possible answer” (p .68). He presents the satirical stance in the poem *The Waste Land*. He says that in beginning of writing Eliot designs to mention society with bitterness that sharp speech seems as solution of the poem itself. It is like reply hiding inside the poem to solve complexity. The above line depicts the satirical writing of the poem that presents the solution. Robert S. Lehman observes the former part of *The Waste Land* as sarcastic tone which itself brings the solution to problems. So, he brings the notion of solution by using the sarcastic or critical tone in first part of writing or rough part of the poem itself.

Hamilton (2008) explains, “The Waste Land can be read as a poem depicting the anguish and the misery of a world after a devastating war” (p.16). He as the critic of *The Waste Land* shows the verse as the output to show the destructed modern universe after “First World War.” He presents that this poetry depicts the modern tensions and worries after dreadful battlefield. The line brings the terror and painful sound of early modernism. He has brought the concept of anxiety and pitiable condition of “First World War”.

Davinia Hamilton seems to analyze *The Waste Land*

as the output of destructed earth of modern society that has ruined the life of European people in great deal. He presents Eliot's composition to show the tragic life of conflict. After "First World War" people were sick and they used to pick up only dead people. That sickness was the output of modern tragic strife. After conflict, the people seemed in confusion. The breath of terror was prevalent everywhere. That pitiable condition after battle is completely illustrated in the verse *The Waste Land* according to Hamilton. Anyway, he sees tears and death around modern time after "First World War." He truly explains *The Waste Land* as the result of "First World War" at the early phase of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are different views regarding Eliot and his poem *The Waste Land*. Some critics and poetic lines of *The Waste Land* are described above to show the definite meaning of "Spiritual Crisis." This research has focused on the desert of modern war time. The poem shows the modernity as destructed time due to war that has lost spirituality. The research seeks to depict the spiritual crisis of modern period through the poem *The Waste Land*.

## Conclusion

T. S. Eliot as the western popular figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century was born in America and became genuine author in England. He became American-English author in modern time. He is much known to his poem *The Waste Land* which shows the spiritual crisis of modernity. His huge tribute in literature in modern time is really memorable and remarkable. His life is also nourished with many upheavals. He as the moral poet seeks peace in modern time but he does not seem to meet spiritual entity in his time. So his poem *The Waste Land* depicts the torture, troubles and lack of spirituality of his time.

His way of showing early modern as it is, refers his skill of art to challenge the modern war and society. He as the huge figure of the modern time reflects the society as it is through his poem *The Waste Land*. He has focused on the war, destruction, loss of true love, sex-oriented society and so on. His huge craft as poet is praiseworthy in world that has depicted

war's destruction, pollution and vulgar society within his poem. Eliot as the mouthpiece of modern time has displayed the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as it is. He has brought the theme of devastation, destruction and death of First World War. He has shown the lack of spiritual entity. The spiritual crisis is a kind of disease that brings disaster, separation and tragic life. Eliot has brought the life of hollowness that life in ashes is not possible to revive. That meaningless life is due to spiritual crisis.

*The Waste Land* is divided in five segments. In every part, there seems absurdity and hopeless situation of the modern time. That time has lost spirituality and peaceful society is kidnapped by war and technology. That has lost the pleasant days and spiritual crisis seems everywhere in world. Eliot as crafty poet has composed the poem *The Waste Land* to depict the spiritual crisis of the modern time.

**External Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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