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ORIENTAL WISDOM in OCCIDENTAL LITERATURE

(*WaltWhitmanand T.S. Eliot*)

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Abstract:

From the vast storehouse of philosophic thought, "the infinite greatness of the past", emerges India as an integral symbol of man's quest for the infinite---India with her "flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, old occult Brahma intermittently far back, the tender and junior Buddha...."
--A *Passage to India* by Walt Whitman--

All the great philosophers of the world have recognized the supremacy of the unknown over the known, the transcendental over the empirical. If the senses of the body do not ultimately lead us on to the Divine Self, they have not performed their true function, it is propounded in Indian texts. Whenever the Western world, especially the American writers, sought to explore the transcendental nature of reality, they turned to the*Oriental* wisdom of Vedic India.*Occidental* literature, therefore, has always been thriving on *Oriental* wisdom.Evidently, Vedic knowledge of ancient India carried the western writers,those who sought to embark on a spiritual quest, beyond the confines of empirical experience.The synthesis of oriental and occidental wisdom offers a sustainable path of a harmonious co-existenceand interconnectedness to humanity. *VasudhaivaKutumbkam,*a Sanskrit phrase in Indian scriptures, teaches that the whole world is one (my) family.Verily, oriental wisdom is 'a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme religion'. [Sri Aurbindo]. The spirit of Hinduism is not dogmatic. It was the essential liberality of Hindu thought and transcendentalism that appealed naturally to Western scholars, its appeal extending to writers of all nationalities and religions, notwithstanding human limitations.The whole oeuvre of Walt Whitman and T. S. Eliot makes an emphatic statement, revealing how deeply the*Oriental*wisdom of Vedic India transformed their poetic vision and sensibility to provide it a universal undertone running parallel with *occidental* wisdom.

Keywords:
Oriental, Occidental, Universal Self, Vedic, Universal, Mystic, Soul, Divine, Immortality, Sterility Regeneration, interconnectedness.

Walt Whitman's loving, all-embracing "temperament and mental makeupfound a ready guide and companion in the book of Indian Philosophy, the *Bhagavad Gita*.[1] Whitman never fully elaborated his indebtedness to Indian thought, though he seems to have been intimately conversant with the "Shastras and Vedas" (Song *of Myself)*, often imagining "the Hindooteaching his favorite pupil the loves, wars, adages, transmitted safely to this day from poets who wrote three thousand years ago." (*Salut Au Monde*). Walt Whitman's continuing assertions that his poems were the result of untainted inspiration have provided critics with the challenge of deciphering the real influences which shaped the poet's art. Itwas not until the twentieth century, however, that Whitman's ideas were compared to those of specific Hindu traditions. Scholars in this area have attempted to find varying kinds of significance in a parallel or connection between Whitman and Hinduism. V.R. Kanadey observes in "Walt

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Whitman and The Bhagavad Gita": "It is true that the overwhelming look of his poetry is a massive encounter with America...But a more patient look at his poetry reveals magnificent range of "the separate countless free identities" from alien lands, especially from India."[2] Thoreau too, recognized Whitman's poetry to be "wonderfully like the Orientals."[3] In his search for the transcendental reality and in his strident acceptance of the cosmic process Whitman comes close to both the *Bhagavad Gita* and Buddhism. Professor V.K. Chari rightly observes: "Whether impelled by native or foreign influences or by his own innate disposition, Whitman came to express in his poems a body of mystical beliefs which are also the fundamental assumptions of the Hindu *Advait* Vedanta. *The Leaves of Grass* is to be studied and understood rather as a body of mystical verse comparable to the apocalyptic utterances of the Upanishads and the *Gita* than as a finished work of art."[4]

The Orientalphilosophy of Hindu texts posits that the "self"is an illusion, and that we are all interconnected. In Hinduism, "the self" is described by the relationship between Brahman and Atman. Brahman is the Divine or the universal power, while Atman is the human soul or the Self that is part of the Brahman.Whitman'slandmark *Leaves of Grass* explores the mysticism of diving into the realm of the soul and spirit.So, itis replete with allusions to "the epics of Asia" and "the elder religions".

"Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul",sings Whitman in *Song of Myself*.Whitman believed in the existence and immortality of the human soul, in the existence of the Divine Spirit, and in the capacity of a human being to establish communion between his spirit and the Divine Spirit. For him, there is no difference between the Creator and the creation. His self is a universal self. He enters into a mystical state in the opening lines of *Song of Myself*:

I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you

His egoism reaches its height, which persists throughout his work. 'I' has a double significance. Firstly, it is applied to Whitman. Secondly, it has universal application. We have to imagine a sympathetic identification of Whitman with other individual self. The universal aspect of 'I' may also refer to a mystical union of Whitman with God, the Absolute Self, though one cannot forget Whitman's consciousness of his own identity and of the separateness of his identity. Section 5 of *Song of Myself* celebrates not only the supremacy of nature but also the unity between Man, Nature and God:

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all men ever born are
also, my brothers, and the women
my sisters and lovers,

Animals symbolized for Whitman the innate goodness, simplicity and kindness of all creation. Unlike the world of Man which wallowed in greed, lust, duplicity and brutality, the world of animals still retained the pristine happiness and placid contentment of the Garden of Eden. In a highly moving passage in *Song of Myself*, he pays a poet's tribute to the animals:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and lie awake for their sins,

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They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, nor one is demented with the mania of owning things, ...
So, they show their relation to me, and I accept them.
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possessions.

Whitman always sought to explore the transcendental nature of reality. His vision led him into the regions of the unknown, the unseen, the unheard and the unexpressed, revealing to his mind the deepest truths about the ultimate reality.

To an Indian reader, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* has a special significance, since it carries palpable transcendental overtones from the *BhagavadGita,* which was his constant companion. In *Song of Myself* one hears echoes of Lord Krishna in the *Gita:*

With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches,
for conquer'd and slain persons...
... ...
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous,
I make appointments with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited....
There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

The saint and the sinner, the almsgiver and the beggar, the high and the low---are welcomed by the genuine creative artist who, God-like, receives them all in his arms.The correspondence between the *BhagavadGita*and *Leaves of Grass* becomes still more intimate when Whitman suggests his potentially to assume any form. With a peculiar resonance from the *Gita,* one reads:

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul.
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.
I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off, no law prevents me.
I anchor my ship for a little while only,
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.
(*Song of Myself)*

Whenever the cause of righteousness shall fail, the Lord will descend upon the earth to redress all wrongs and undo the evil:
...I rise, from age to age and take,
Visible shape, and move a man with men,
Succouring the good...
(*The Song Celestial*)

It is in the same symbolic role that Whitman, representing the Divine Self, proclaims:

Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun...
Helping the Llama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols...

Again, if the Lord holds equal both gain and loss, influx and efflux, victory and defeat, joy and pain, so does Whitman equate all opposites:

Have you heard it was good to gain the day?

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I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit
in which they are won.

The wise man is he who can transcend all contraries and perceive a fundamental unity beneath all diversity.In expressing the unfathomability of the soul, Whitman seems to echo the voice of the Lord:

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never
measured and never will be measured ….
I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am encloser of
Things to be.
(*Song of Myself*)

And again in "Song of the Open Road", he holds himself above all censure or praise:
Whoever denies me it shall not trouble
me,
Whoever accepts me he or she shall be
blessed and shall bless me.

Whitman's *Passage to India* gathers within its symphonic cumulation all that may be best in the great religions of the world, both Eastern and Western. He grows and develops into a Poet-Prophet with a vision of world unity, as Floyd Stovall observes in his "Main Drifts in Whitman's Poetry"[5]--a landmark article in Whitman's criticism. Here he has created a myth that the Poet, the true son of God, is born when lands and people have been joined and man has made utmost material progress. God's purpose in the physical realm has bern fulfilled, people and lands have been united; now the true 'Poet' (Brahma, the Creator in Man) must come to complete God's hidden prophetic intention by recovering the paradisal state for mankind. The speaker emerges as the Poet-Prophet who makes an imaginary journey upwards for a mystical union with God. The heavenly ascension of the poet and his soul is symbolized by the spiral movement corresponding to the material accomplishments on the horizontal plane. Now that lands and people have been united, it is the whole globe as well as the individual soul that the upward spiral movement of the poet links with heaven. The paradise which is restored to man is within his inner self as well as on earth. In this state, life will be renewed; Nature, Man and God will be harmonized; and Man will live at peace with himself and with the surrounding universe. In his poem "Portals", he asks:
What are those of the known but to ascend and enter the Unknown?
Whitman always believed that "grander far was the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing all those, lighting the light, the sky and stars, delving the earth, sailing the sea (*What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul? Of what amount without thee?*)"
Leaves of Grass, like *Paradise Lost,* also justifies the ways of God to man. Although not designed as an epic, the range of experience represented here is no less epical. Its purport is:

Not to exclude or demarcate, or pick out evils from them
formidable masses (even to expose them),
But add, fuse, complete, extend---and celebrate the immortal
And the good.
(*L. of G.'s Purport*)

A spiritual experience for Whitman is possible without sacrificing the physical appetites. He was able to connect realism with transcendentalism. The poet delights in a complete familiarity with every inch of his body.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me…
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile…

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His love for the human body is noteworthy. He treats body and soul equal-- neither of them is to be subordinate to the other:
I believe in you my soul, the other I must not abase itself to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.

The soul accepts the invitation of Self to '*Loafe with me on the grass'*. For '*only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice',* he insists.Section 5 beautifully portrays the mystical state of his consciousness:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my barestrip heart

According to Hindu philosophy, deliverance of soul (Moksha) is attained only after one has experienced and gone through the three stages: Dharam, Arth, Kam. And 'Kam', lovemaking described in the exquisite sculptures of **Khajuraho**temples of India, is the pre-requisite of Moksha or awakening of the soul. The importance of Section 7 lies in the different meanings which the poet discovers in such an ordinary thing as the grass andin the poet's firm belief in immortality. Grass, a tangible physical reality, is a key to the ultimate enigma of Divine Reality. R.S. Pathak observes pertinently:

"The unity and disintegration of the three archetypal characters mentioned in the *Gita* also served as the basis of classifications of humanity in Blake and Whitman. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake divided the human personality into the 'The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genital Beauty, the hands and feet proportion.' Whitman appropriated these universal qualities on to himself in *Song of Myself*. His sensual man, 'gaunt and grim, with well-grey'd hair, and flesh all sunken about the eyes', a Spring figure symbolized by the child bubbling with passion and curiosity, and the Strong Man, 'very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory', like Eliot's, were inspired by the Gita's classifications."[6]

Thus, every aspect of Whitman's work can be analyzed in the context of profound mystical dimensions of Hinduism.

Oriental Wisdom in T. S. Eliot:

Eliot's understanding of the Hindumysticism that he encountered in the early years of this century has a special significance in the world of Occidental literature. He translated the implications of this understanding into poetic practice, especially in his 'Magnum Opus'-*The Waste Land* (1922), that won him the Nobel Prize in 1948 and then later in *Four Quartets,* that makes one understand what mysticism in poetry means after all. He admits the profound influence of Hindu texts in his interview by RanjeeShahani in 1949:

Shahani: Do you know any cultures beside the western?
T. S. Eliot: Not very much, except that of India?
Shahani: What do you know of the achievement of India?
T. S. Eliot: India has already given something of the highest to the world.
Shahani: What?
T.S.Eliot: That without spiritual knowledge man is an incomplete being.
Shahani: Which Indian books and writers have impressed you the most?
T.S.Eliot:The Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita.[7]

Eliot described the *Bhagavad Gita* as the "second greatest philosophical poem"[8] within his experience. "...What we learn from Dante or Gita or any other religious poetry, is what it feels

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like to believe in that religion." In his own words, then, T. S. Eliot accepts that what he learnt from the *Gita* was what he felt like to believe in. "...so far as the Gita is concerned, Eliot approaches not only the peripheries of its philosophy and religion but he seems to penetrate into the very essence of it."[9]

The very title of *The Waste Land*, and the sense in which it has been used, can be traced to the Upanishads and the Gita. The full title of the Gita is Sri Bhagavad Gita Upanishad. The Upanishads, a remarkable group of scriptures, are, in fact, the main source of the Gita. Hence, the need to relate the latter with the former. The phrase "Waste Land" brings to our mind the image of a dry land with "no water", but just the mirage of water, suggested by such sounds as "drip drop drip drop." It creates in the mind of the traveller only a fantasy of water. This picture gets further impetus from the repeated reference Eliot makes to the physical waste land: for instance, "the dead land" (1.2), "stony rubbish" (1.20), "rock and no water and the sand road" (1.332), "the cracked earth" (1.369), "the arid plain," (1.424), and so on. By inversion, the fertility symbol of water is implied in the title *The Waste Land*, and this relates Eliot's poem with the *Gita* (e.g., 3.14 and 11.28) and the *Upanishads*. By implication and transposition, the title of the *BrihadaranyakaUpanishad*isa variant of *The Waste Land*:

> The above- mentioned Upanishad which contains six chapters is called Aranyaka As being spoken of in a desert, and Brihad (great) from its extent.[10]

Like Lord Krishna's message to Arjuna, Eliot's poem, too, is a *ParamamGuhyam* (The Gita: 11.1), a secret message delivered in a desert to its inhabitants to liberate themselves form the *Mayajal*, illusory golden hind. In fact, man's search for water comes to symbolise his metaphysical quest for regeneration and fertility. In the Chandogya Upanishad, water becomes a natural expression of the conjunction of the finite with the infinite:

> These rivers, my son, run, the Eastern (like the Ganga) towards the East, the Western (like the Sindhu) towards the West. They go from sea to sea (i.e., the clouds lift up the water from the sea to the sky and send it back as rain to the sea). They become, indeed, sea. And as those rivers, when they are in the sea, do not know, I am this and that river.... (VI.10.1)

But in *The Waste Land* this Upanishadic concept is reversed. Here "the river's tent is broken" (1.173), "Ganga was sunken" (1.395), "the deep-sea swell.../A current under sea/Picked his bones in whispers" (11.313-15). In Eliot's poem, the river carries the freight of sin, original and new, of history and metaphysical thought. In *The Waste Land*, the sea is a menace. It is the scene of human tragedy. Whereas in the Chandogya Upanishad the rivers give up their particularity in the timeless ocean of Being- "Ocean is the one seer without any duality" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: IV.3.32)- in *The Waste Land* duality is a way of life. The *Gita* repeatedly conjures up the images of dry land resulting from human selfishness. Dhritarashtra sends an emissary through Sanjaya to the Pandavas to dissuade them from resorting to war and yet he himself is not willing to return the Pandavas their realm. Krishna is present on the occasion and he points out that the King's selfishness will ultimately lead to war and thereby to chaos and destruction, rendering the country a waste land. Here Vyasa uses the imagery of the rivers flowing through the vast expanses of the earth, fertilising the land, fostering life, affirming that the universe is a great orchestrated system where every component entity works for the whole. To go against this system is to drift to death; this is the new altered use of the water image in the "Vishvarupa" sequence in the Gita (11.28):

> As the many rushing torrents of rivers race towards the ocean, so do these heroes of the world of men rush into Thy flaming months.

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When a man wills a deed, he wills its consequences also. The free activities subject us to their results; this is the law of cause and consequence.

Again, in the Gita comes another variant of the water image, a symbol of fertility; "From food, creatures come into being; from rain, is the birth of food…" (3.14). The Prasna Upanishad also uses rainwater as the fertility-symbol: "When the rain pours down from heaven, O life, all thy creatures rejoice and they say: 'Food for us all shall be in abundance.'[5] Water is, thus, in the Gita, the Upanishads and The Waste Land, a central symbol of metaphysical and temporal quest.

The first section of The Waste Land, "The Burial of the Dead", introduces water as a cause of a state of death-in-life:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (11.1-4)

Here, when the lack of water is felt, it assumes a positive character. Water becomes for the denizens of the waste land a painful reminder of their spiritual barrenness. The reality of life ultimately leads to a sense of awareness. This is the logical consequence of Eliot's inversion of the vegetation myth of water that the Gita suggests: "From rain is the birth of food." Though for the most part, water is something to be feared in *The Waste Land*, yet paradoxically, only water is the source of liberation for the waste-landers. In this connection, John B. Alphonso Karkala makes a pertinent observation on the ways to make the waste land fertile again:

> This involves the human response to the voice of Thunder (moral teachings or revelations), the rain waters (Ganga, the element of grace that descend the divine Shiva in response to Bhagiratha-like intense Tapas or yearnings), the ploughing of the parched land (active practice of restraints and virtues), and the consequent reactivating of the spiritual spring from within (re-integration of mind, spirit and body and resurrection in a state of grace).[11]

Water thus, in the *Gita,* the *Upanishads,* and in *The Waste Land,* is a central symbol of fertility. The *Prasana Upanishad* uses rain-water as the fertility symbol: "When the rain pours down from heaven, O Life, all thy creatures rejoice and they say: " Food for us all shall be in abundance."[12]Hence, in "What the Thunder Said", though Ganga, the river – a symbol of the continuous flow of life on earth, of faith and wisdom- is sunken (reminiscent of Krishna's prediction to Dhritarashtra), the dark clouds are gathered far distant over Himavant, promising life-giving water.

In the Indian tradition, Ganga, the name of the divine consort of Shiva, is the name of the holy river as well as the generic word for the sacred water. Himavant, the source of the Ganga on earth, is mythologically the father of the divine mother Parvati as well as the abode of the divine couple. The sunken river, therefore, symbolises at once the debased state of existence and shrivelled stream of life and civilisation. The black clouds are the promise of salvation. The sunken river and black clouds correspond successively to the ocean and water imagery, the ways to eternity as Krishna tells Arjuna:

> That man attains peace, into whom all desires enter in the same way as waters flow into a sea that remains unchanged (even) when being filled up from all sides. Not so one who is desirous of objects. (2.70)

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This world is an ocean of death-bound existence, and one who is forward-looking, with faith in the universal good and control over his desires, can attain liberation. This is the message of Gita as also of *The Waste Land* in "What the Thunder Said."

According to the *Mundka Upanishad*: "As rivers flowing into the ocean find their final peace and their name and form disappear, even so the wise become free from name and form and enter into the radiance of the Supreme Spirit who is greater than all greatness." (3.2). Water, thus, is used in two paradoxical terms: sterility-death-flux versus fertility-life-eternity.

Both the Gita and *The Waste Land* are set in a conflict-situation. Prof. Sisirkumar Ghose calls the Gita "crisis literature". This is also true of Eliot's poem as Nancy K.Gish remarks:

> *The Waste Land* is often said to be about living death, revulsion at sexuality and sensuality, and need for rebirth. But it is primarily about the failure of relationship, what Eliot was later to call the fear of 'belonging to another or to others, or to God.' This fear appears in all three ways: the separation from the hyacinth girl and the thought that 'your heart would have responded,' the breakdown of Europe and hence of social relations, the inability to see the mysteries or Christ.[13]

Similarly, the *Gita* is set in the midst of the great Kurukshetra war, the result of "the breakdown of family and social relations and the inability to see the mysteries" or God. Both the armies are drawn up, the clamour of war is tumultuous, and the hearts of the participants are torn by the conflict. Historically, Eliot's poem, too, is set in the background of the World War. *The Waste Land* is also set in another Kurukshetra which is within us, within our psyche and the Asuric and the Daivik powers are drawn up in battle array against each other. Within the hearts and consciousness of the waste-landers this battle is being fought. Anne C.Bolgan opines: "The Waste land reveals ... three major unresolved conflicts... the conflicts, that is, between the underlying postulates of public and private, scenic and psychic, and romantic and modern."[14] The conflict between "romantic and modern" corresponds to Gita's presentation of antique Upanishadic message and the contemporary "Kurukshetra" war. This is, in fact, a conflict between good and evil. The Gita refers to the field of war as a "Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra" --- the field of righteousness, duty or normal struggle (which The *Waste Land* typifies) and the field of Kuru's clan. The Kauravas represent Evil and the Pandavas Good or Righteousness. Mahatma Gandhi saw the battle as the "duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal battle more alluring.[15] Kurukshetra, in short, is a field that will test man's moral integrities.

The phrase "Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra", thus, suggests the law of life through death, illumination through death of self. Kurukshetra is also called "*Tapahkshetra*", the field of penance, of discipline. Therefore, death (in spiritual terms) is often a way to rebirth. That may be a physical death leading to resurrection (like that of Christ), or death of the self (that is self-sense or ego) causing spiritual awakening. The theme of rebirth as such appears both in the Gita and the Upanishads. Grover Smith sees in Eliot's use of the river and the sea an allusion "to the Hindu parable of the life-rebirth cycle: the drop of water lifted as vapour from the sea, deposited as rain upon the Himalaya, and carried again seaward by the Ganga."[16] That is to say, the sea has the similitude of eternity into which all rivers pour. But the water becomes vapour (human body) again. This is the process of rebirth.

The Gita in verse 22 of Chapter 2 describes death as a starting point of another life: "Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on other that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-our bodies and takes on others that are new." The Katha Upanishad also preaches the same thing: "Like corn, a mortal ripens and life corn, is he born again." (1.6). "The Burial of the Dead" embodies the garment symbol of the Gita signifying

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death and rebirth in the physical or temporal sense. The fertility gods--Adonis, Attis and Osiris--who are drowned as effigies in the waters of the river Nile are believed to rise again in the fuller and richer life of the corn. This myth, says James Frazer, is assimilated in the Christian myth of crucifixion, martyrdom and resurrection of Christ to make the waste land spiritually fertile again. Death-in-life is, thus, transformed into life-in-death. Similarly, the dialectical meaning of "Death by Water" emerges from the simple collision of death by water in the baptismal sense (as contained in the title) with the physical sense as contained in the text. The loss of self (that is death) required in the first instance is the vehicle through which one is born into a higher life. A similar transformation of the gross self into an enlightened being underlies the Hindu ceremony of twice born. In the Gita, Duryodhana calls Drona, his Guru, as "best of the twice born", "*dwijottama*". That means a man born out of woman knows this world and a man born out of himself knows the world beyond this world. In "Death by Water", Phlebas, rising and falling, is sucked up by the Whirlpool of death:

As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool. (11. 316-18)

Here there is a hint at the process of renewal and rebirth of a drowning man (drowned effigy of the fertility god) moving back from the point of death through all the stages of old age, youth, childhood to the moment of birth. By inversion, Phlebas moves from death to birth, that is rebirth. The doctrine of rebirth suggests the soul's immortality, a fact emphasised repeatedly in the Gita.

Eliot gives to the mythical archetype of the dying and reviving god the all-inclusive redemptive pattern by yoking together in one identity both the agent and the patient, the healer and the healed, the quester hero and the Fisher King. Both the Fisher King whose lands are waste, and the quester hero through whom they are finally to be restored are telescoped into a third mythical figure, Tiresias. Here is Eliot's note on Tiresias: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator, is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest." Tiresias, thus, combines the characteristics of the Fisher King and the quester hero which Eliot derives from the participants of the Kurukshetra War. The Fisher King, like Dhritarashtra, is a withered plant, spiritually a eunuch. In Tiresias, too, the two sexes meet. Again, like Dhritarashtra Tiresias is blind. But Tiresias, the Fisher King and Dhritarashtra are blind spiritually more than physically. All the characters in *The Waste Land* merge into Tiresias, and in his consciousness, Eliot projects a variety of correlated images of spiritual waste and death, drawn from the past as well as the present.

Like Vyasa, Eliot also uses the technique of reportage: Sanjaya, servitor of Dhritarashtra, upon whom is bestowed the visionary power of seeing and knowing everything that will take place on the battlefield, including also what is being thought. The Gita is actually reported or told by Sanjaya, though he is a mere spectator and, therefore, external to the action. Similarly, too, Tiresias is an "external spectator," a prophet and a "seer" capable of looking at the events occurring in the past, present and future. Tiresias' "*divya* eye" equates him with Arjuna on whom God bestows the visionary power: "Thou canst not behold Me with this (human) eye of yours; I will bestow on thee the supernatural eye." (11.8). Through Lord's grace, Arjuna develops full capacity of apprehension and sees all past, present and future in the present. Like Arjuna and the Fisher King, Tiresias, in a way, is also a seeker, a quester. Thus, Eliot's intention of telescoping the Fisher King/Dritarashtra, Quester Hero/Arjuna, Sanjaya/Tiresias is clear enough.

The *Gita* presents catastrophe as "Karmic nemesis." The Kurukshetra war is a presentation of such a "karmic nemesis." The greed and self-centredness of Dhritarashtra is the primary cause of the tragedy. The old king gloats over the scene when Draupadi, clad only in a single

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garment, is dragged by her hair to the Kaurava Assembly by Dushasana. Later, the fear of revenge by the Pandavas torments and haunts him. In his troubled dreams Dhritrashtra sees: "the entire Kaurava army being dragged and molested as if it were a weak, helpless woman." Eliot's use of the myths of Tiresias and the Fisher King reiterates the concept of "karmic nemesis". The theme of *The Waste Land* (as also of the myth of the Fisher King) is correlated with barrenness, animality and sexual perversion of its inhabitants. Eliot clearly turns the plight of the waste-landers into a "karmic nemesis" when the allusions of "the dead land," and "the cracked earth" are introjected finally within the personalised metonymy of the line: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" That means "I", the Fisher King himself is responsible for the disorder in the land, because he commits sins of adultery, fornication and abnormal sexual acts. What, then, interests Eliot is the character of the Fisher King and the subsequent disease together with the fact that the disease has reacted disastrously upon his 'lands', both public and private.

The myth of Philomela corresponds to the Draupadi scene underscoring the degenerated morality of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land* and the Kingdom of Dhritarashtra.

One may also interpret *The Waste Land* in terms of five elements which constitute life on earth.Verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 7 of the *Gita* refer to these elements. "The Burial of the Dead"corresponds to Earth; "The Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon" to fire (of passion); "Death by Water" to water; (symbol of regeneration); "What theThunder Said"to Air and Sky (Spiritual Preaching).

The seeker arrives at the Truth, according to the *Gita*, when he becomes one with Brahman. Arjuna identifies himself with God, gives up his ego, "the separate existence", finds God pervading through all human beings; God is in all, and all are in God, and thus arrives at the Truth. In *The Waste Land*, this oneness, this unity and identification are suggested by the transformation of "I" of Tiresias into "We" in "What the Thunder Said":

What have we given? (1.401)

For in the Gita, to a man with *Atmadrishti*, or, "spiritual consciousness", all Jivas are alike (5.18).

In Tiresias' case, the teacher, "Jagadguru", takes the form of God speaking incognito through thunder, "the voice of God" referred to in the Hindu scriptures as "*Akashwani*". Robert N.Minor defines Acharya as "one who knows the rules… conduct, rules, customs."[17] Minor further points out:

> Manu 2.140 defines an Acharya as a "Brahmin who initiates a pupil and teaches him the Veda together with the Kalpa (the Sutras which teach the rules described in the Veda) and the *Rahasyas* (the Upanishads)."[18]

In this sense, the message of the thunder is symbolic in its conception and execution. As a teacher it unfolds the "Rahasyas" of "DA" to the Deva, Manushya, and Asura and echoes the "conduct, rule, custom" to make life spiritually awakened. Thus, the divine character or disposition of the teacher in *The Waste Land* connects it with the Gita where Lord Krishna is the manifestation of the Brahman.And yet, this very Krishna appears in the Gita as a charioteer, as a guide, as one holding the reins of the chariot. Usually, the driver is supposed to be subordinate to the owner of the chariot, but here we have the reverse. The rider in the chariot of the body is Arjuna, but the charioteer is Krishna, and he has to guide the journey. Thus, the journey motif becomes central to the Gita. In the *Katha Upanishad* there is a clear exposition of the chariot-metaphor:

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> Know the self as the rider, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins, the senses as the horses. (Part 3)

"A bad driver with wild horses... reaches not the end of the journey but wanders on from death to death" (*KathaUpanishad*: Part 3). A similar idea is contained in Maitri Upanishad (IV.4) also.

This image of the chariot culminates on the field of Kurukshetra in the Gita, when the Lord himself is the charioteer driving Arjuna, the seeker, through the journey to a vision of the Truth. According to Juan Mascaro: "The light of Truth is the end of the journey."The landscape and action of "What the Thunder Said" define all that has preceded in terms of a journey pattern. We move from the perilous ocean voyage ("Death by Water") to the journey on the dry land. The faces, voices, scenes and memories become parts of a whole. They all contribute to the "continuous phantasmagoria" (Eliot's phrase for Dante's journey in the *Inferno*) through which the consciousness of the protagonist moves towards the Chapel perilous. As we follow "the road winding above among the mountains", the protagonist senses the presence of Him whose terrible absence seems confirmed by contemporary actuality:

He who was living in now lead...
When I count, there are only you and I together

The quest for the Grail culminates in dizzying look backward at the whole journey; the lines 367 to 385 of *The Waste Land* are a nightmarish echo-chamber recalling as well as distorting what has gone before. The Grail turns out to be not a vision, but the sounds of the fabled thunder:

DA
Datta; Dayadhvam; Damyata

Eliot derives the episode of thunder from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The offspring of Prajapati after completing their education ask their father for the final secret that makes life of each meaningful and ultimately leads to salvation. Then Prajapati utters the syllable DA to Deva, Manushya and Asura in turn and asks them what each of them understood of it. For gods, the syllable meant Damyata--control yourself; for men, Datta--give; and for demons, Dayadhvam --be compassionate. What is significant here is that the syllable DA conveys different meanings to different beings. The message which each group derives is born out of an instinctive consciousness on the part of the particular group of its inherent defect.

Seen in the context of the Gita, the multiple meaning conceived by the three categories of students basically instructs them into the realisation of the prime need to restrain their potential according to the dominant Gunas—Sattva, Rajas, Tamas: namely, restraint against misuse of strength (exercise of kindness). These three messages are basic to Krishna's ethical philosophy of the Self in the *Gita*. The practice of Jnana Yoga (Union with God), which Krishna tells Arjuna in Chapter 6, involves three factors. First comes *Pratyahara*, the process of arresting the outgoing activities of the senses, *Indriyarthesu*. In 6.10, the Gita mentions *NirasirAparigraha*- Nirasi means freedom from desires and Aparigraha means freedom from longing for possession. The lower self then is not to be destroyed but can be used as a helper if it is held in check. Eliot, too, moves on the same track:

Datta: What have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender (11. 400-3)

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Lust in *The Waste Land* is the only form of giving.

What we must 'give' is suggested by the *Gita* in Chapter 12, verses 4, 13 and 14, Chapter 17, verses 14, 15, 16 and 20. Here, Lord Krishna says that man should restrain all the senses, be even-minded in all conditions, rejoice in the welfare of all creatures, be friendly and compassionate, free from egoism and self-sense, unshakable in determination; he should worship teachers and the gods, be pure and upright, his utterance should give no offence and should be truthful, beneficial and pleasant, and his duty is to give.

The second significant factor in the Jnana Yoga in Ahimsa, non-violence, which is born of a stripping of Ahankara-ego or self-sense. Krishna advises Arjuna to fight without passion or ill-will, without anger, selfishness and attachment and if we develop such a frame of mind violence becomes impossible. The emphasis of the Gita is on *Loksamgraha*, world solidarity and human brotherhood. In *The Waste Land* the use of DA as Dayadhvam (be compassionate) warns the protagonist against the Tamas attribute of his nature, thereby making him aware of his incapacity of transcendent the prison of the self:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison (11.411-14)

Human contact, universal brotherhood and good are suggested as a key to the prison of the self.

Finally comes Damyata, self-control, as *Yatachittatma* in the *Gita*. Self-control comes from the sacrifice of the ego and surrender to the Divine. In order to reach the shore safely, man has to steer the boat of his life "beating obedient to controlling hands." To learn to be serene and quiet also means a life of control and discipline. Krishna calls it the penance of mind in Chapter 17, verse 16.

After the practice of three virtues, Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata, that is charity, compassion and self-control, follows "shantih", the benediction of peace reflecting a state of mind after a complete resolution of all disturbances, anxieties and doubts. "Shanith" is the state of existence of liberation while living, that is *Jivanmukti* described in the Gita in 5.19-20 and 2.55-72 as a state of non-attachment to Prakriti, indifference to its workings, and contentment in the self. It is a state of *BrahmaniSthitah* (5.20).

The word "shantih" is purposefully used by Eliot at the end of the poem. It figures as a finish of a variety of chants, scriptures and literary classics. The word "shantih" is deliberately repeated thrice to indicate the absolute three-dimensional peace[19] resulting from a freedom from all disturbances from within (*Adhyatmikam*):

> He who finds his happiness within, his joy within, and likewise his light only within.. attains to the beatitude of God (Brahmanirvana). (5.24)

Peace from above (Adidaivikam):

> The holy men whose sins are destroyed, whose doubts (dualities) are out asunder, whose minds are disciplined and who rejoice in (doing) good to all creatures, attain to the beatitude of God (5.25)

Peace from around (Adibhoutikam):

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To those austere souls who are delivered from desire and anger and who have subdued their minds and have knowledge of the Self, near to them lies the beatitude of God. (5.26) Thus, the unity of *The Waste Land* is the kind of unity we find in the *Gita*. Eliot's poem gives the mystical excitement of a spiritual voyage of self-discovery.

Eliot's treatment of darkness in his work reads like a paraphrase of the second sense of darkness in the *Gita*. The poet is all for 'union, a deeper communication/ Through the dark cold and the empty desolation'. The hopeful darkness mentioned by Eliot is, in fact, a mystical state – 'a state of enlightened mystification', which he himself felt at Harvard after going through the mazes of Hindu metaphysics:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon
you
Which shall be the darkness of God.

'The darkness,' says the poet in *Murder in the Cathedral,* 'declares the glory of light'.He adds in *East Coker* that it can descend only 'when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing'.The immediate source for his concept of the dark night of the soul, as enunciated in section 111 of *Burnt Norton,* is to be found in Indian philosophy, especially in the *Gita's* way of contemplation by voiding the mind of everything except faith. It is the 'darkness to purify the soul/ Emptying the sensual with deprivation/ cleansing affection from the temporal'.
It is also reminiscent of the doctrine of the Ultimate Void of the *Vedas*. The 'disaffection' of *Burnt Norton* is akin to the darkness described in the *Gita*.

"The story of the composition of *Four Quartets*, in relation to mysticism, constitutes one of the most interest pages in modern literary history."Stephen Medcalf remarks in *Times Literary Supplement:*

"History is now and England" and *"With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling"*—sings Eliot in *Four Quartets*. For Eliot, self-realisation need not be a separate activity from the mode of life one has chosen for oneself. This comes to him from Hinduism which propounds that self-realisation is possible in whatever role one is cast in life: a Brahmin through meditation and detached pursuit of knowledge; a Kshatriya, through detached action on the battlefield, if necessary, and by performing his administration duties and so. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that a detached, desire-less action, performed on any level to play a role in the cycle of life is a way to self-realisation. "In recalling Krishna in *The Dry Salvages* Eliot has taken liberties in interpreting the *Gita's* message. In *Little Gidding*, he has reached a point where he can identify himself with Lord Krishna's perceptions and relate them to contemporary experience", observes Vinod Sena.[20] The mystical dimension of Eliot's work is particularly evident in his poetry ofthe 1930s and 1940s. In "Ash Wednesday" (1930), he seeks the spiritual discipline, that will enable him to integrate his fractured experience and prays for the spiritual stillness.

From the anguish of self-doubt and self-questioning through an experience of a revelation leading to a state of wisdom and intellectual liberation and self-realisation—what a grand trajectory of the poetic career of T.S.Eliot! According to Eliot himself, the end of all exploration is to arrive at where one starts, as says Henry Vaughan in his mystical verse "The Retreat":

And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came return.

However, when the cycle is complete, the protagonist does not remain the same as he was at the beginning of the poem.

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Conclusion:

Evidently, Whitman and Eliot evolved as 'Spiritual Questers' on account of their abiding interest in Indian thought, Sanskrit aesthetics and the revealed wisdom of the *Gita*.The 'I' in Whitman's poetry does not signify the circumscribed self of any particular individual; it symbolises the Universal Self, also signifying Man in his universality. When he sings--'It is *I* who am great or it is to be great, I and *You* up there, or *any one…'*—then he implies that I and You, as counterpoints of the same Divine Self, must invariably remain linked to each other.Thus, he sings:

Come, said the Muse,
Sing me a song no poet yet has chanted,
Sing me the universal.
- "Song of the Universal"-

T. S. Eliot also transcends the ramifications of his individual self to seek identification with the Universal, the Divine.As mentioned earlier, Eliot identifies himself with Krishna in *Little Gidding*. *The Waste Land* won him the Nobel Prize only because it amalgamates the profound Indian thought with Christian content and showcases the evolution of human nature. *The Four Quartets* bespeaks of Eliot's belief in the Oriental philosophy that the journey from the demonic to the divine is arduous, but not inconceivable. Whitman and Eliot succeeded in carrying over into their poetry the essence of ancient wisdom of the *Gita* and Upanishadic insights, lending a universal significance to their entire oeuvre.

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