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T.S. Eliot And Indic Thought: Time, Wisdom, And The Search For Transcendence

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Abstract: This paper makes an attempt to explore the echoes of the vision of Hindu philosophy in the select poems and dramas of T. S. Eliot as 'The wasteland', 'Four Quartets', 'The Family Reunion' and 'The Cocktail Party'. These texts of Eliot influenced by the vision of the Upanishad, the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedic philosophy. He unites European tradition and philosophy with Indian philosophical thinking in his works. Although he was a puritan but he got his philosophical maturity in Sanatan philosophy.

Key words: Upanishad, karma, wheel, the still point, liberation, karma

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) is one of the profound poets of the twentieth century in the western world. His primary poems, dramas, essays and criticism echo the vision of Indian philosophy. He is considered as visionary poet who spread Hindu philosophy in western world in the time of world war, when the whole world was facing the consequences of after war and wanted a vision to overcome the existential crisis and Eliot through his works provided a path of Hindu philosophy, which paved the way towards liberation from all the illusions.

Eliot joined Harward University for post graduate study. He studied Sanskrit, Pali, Hindu philosophy, Eastern metaphysics, theology and mysticism there. He was very much impressed by Eastern philosophy which shaped his literary vision and philosophical development. He raised from western philosophical prejudices to the philosophies across the glob and quenched his thrust for philosophical maturity. Eliot's works show how he brought together Eastern and Western spiritual traditions. His study of Indian scriptures gave him a new way to understand life, suffering, and salvation. The influence of the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and Buddhist thought helped him shape a universal spiritual vision. His poetry speaks not only of the troubles of modern man but also of the eternal hope to find peace through faith and self-realization.

T. S. Eliot can rightly be called one of the greatest literary figures of our age. He was not only a poet but also a philosopher and critic who deeply shaped modern literature. Eliot's greatness lies in his ability to combine the wisdom of different traditions. He did not simply join European culture with the American mind; he also absorbed the core ideas of Indian philosophy. His works reflect a beautiful balance between

Western intellect and Eastern spirituality. Critics like Octavio Paz and Delmore Schwartz describe him as a "universal poet and an international hero" (Paz; Schwartz). Eliot's vision was not limited by nationality or religion. He searched for a deeper, spiritual understanding of life, which made his poetry meaningful across all cultures.

Ancient Indian philosophy has always attracted many Western thinkers and poets. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads*, and *Vedas* became popular among scholars in Europe and America. Many writers found in them a sense of peace and spiritual truth that was missing in the materialistic West. The American Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman—were among the first to explore this wisdom. Their poems and essays were filled with ideas from the East. Emerson, for example, wrote in his essay *The Over-Soul*, "The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." This line clearly shows the influence of Hindu philosophy, which sees all living beings as part of one divine whole.

Harvard University was, at that time, a center for Oriental studies. Many scholars and students there were deeply interested in Indian and Buddhist teachings. T. S. Eliot, who studied at Harvard between 1906 and 1914, was naturally influenced by this environment. During his studies, he met some of the most learned teachers of the time, such as Charles R. Lanman and James H. Woods. Lanman was a Sanskrit scholar who had translated many ancient Hindu texts, including portions of the *Rig Veda* and *Upanishads*. James H. Woods, another Harvard professor, was deeply interested in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the philosophy of the Buddha. Their classes and discussions opened a new world of thought for Eliot and helped shape his understanding of life and spirituality. Cleo McNelly Kearns observes that Eliot's engagement with Indic thought was not superficial but "an enduring source of metaphysical vocabulary and imaginative structure" (Kearns 42).

Another great influence on Eliot during this period was Irving Babbitt, a teacher known for his knowledge of Buddhism and moral philosophy. Babbitt believed in discipline, moderation, and moral strength—ideas that also appear in Buddhist teachings. His thoughts guided Eliot to see poetry not only as art but also as a means of spiritual reflection. Under such influences, Eliot began to study the ideas of *karma*, *maya* (illusion), *atman* (soul), and the cycle of time. These ideas became part of his way of understanding human life.

The years Eliot spent at Harvard were very important for his growth as a poet and thinker. During this time, he combined his Puritan upbringing with the wisdom of Eastern thought. The Puritan idea of sin and redemption merged with the Hindu concept of *karma*—the belief that every action has consequences—and the Buddhist belief in *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Eliot began to see human suffering not just as punishment but as part of a larger, divine process.

Eliot's study of Indian philosophy was not shallow or borrowed for fashion. He read deeply, reflected seriously, and used those ideas to explore the human condition. His poetry brought together the sharp reasoning of the West and the spiritual depth of the East. In doing so, he became a bridge between two worlds—showing that wisdom has no boundary of race, country, or religion.

Poetry is a special kind of writing where poets use imagination and emotions to express deep truths. It is not about proving something true but about making that truth real to the reader. As T. S. Eliot says, poetry "is not the assertion that something is true, but making that truth more fully real to us." Eliot was one of the greatest poets and mystics in English literature. He used his spiritual and mystical nature in both his poems and plays.

T. S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on 26 September 1888. He came from a cultured and religious family. He studied at Harvard University, where he came in touch with Indian mysticism and philosophy. Later, he went to England, and in 1927 he became a British citizen and declared himself an Anglo-Catholic.

In his early period, he was influenced by Ezra Pound and the Imagist group, who helped shape his early poetry. His first poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917), already showed a trace of spiritual longing and modern anxiety.

Eliot was not only a poet but also an editor and critic. He worked as the editor of two famous magazines, *The Egoist* and *The Criterion*. He later wrote long poems, critical essays, and plays. Some of his famous works are *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, and *The Confidential Clerk*. Many of these works show his deep study of Indian philosophy and mysticism. Eliot was influenced by Christian mystics like Saint John of the Cross and Dante, as well as by Oriental philosophy such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, and Buddhism.

Eliot himself once said, "Long ago I studied the ancient Indian languages, and while I was chiefly interested at the time in philosophy, I read a little poetry too, and I know that my own poetry shows the influence of Indian thought and sensibility." This clearly shows that his poetry carries traces of Indian ideas of the divine and the eternal. V. Meena Kumari, in her research paper, writes, "Eliot's idea of the divine union might be that of a Christian of Oriental mysticism."

The modernist movement came out as a medium to express the fragmentation and disillusionment of modern life. Eliot was not an exception however, he found relief in spiritual and philosophical doctrines of Hinduism. His engagement with Indian philosophy—especially the Upanishads' concept of time and the *Bhagavad Gita's* doctrine of detached action—fill his work with an alternative vision of universality of divine existence. This paper examines the Indic resonances across Eliot's major works, emphasizing how Eastern thought reshaped his poetic and dramatic imagination.

Although Eliot did not complete his doctoral dissertation on F.H. Bradley, his philosophical studies provided him with categories—such as time, experience, and reality—that would recur throughout his poetry. Indic philosophy gave him an alternative framework for conceiving time, not as linear but cyclical, and wisdom, not as accumulation of knowledge but as realization of higher truth and his" theory and treatment of time philosophy is more mature, comprehensive, digestible and further it is completely based on his private experiences"(Kukreti: 19)

Eliot's 1922 masterpiece *The Waste Land* published in the 'The Criterion' edited by Eliot himself. It is often interpreted as a reflection of postwar disillusionment, yet its closing lines - *"Shantih shantih shantih"*—reveals an Indic magnitude. The chanting is taken from the Upanishads, invokes peace that surpasses ordinary understanding. It is not mere resignation but a transcendental state of balance. As A. David Moody notes, Eliot's decision to end the poem with *shantih* indicates "an aspiration toward a peace beyond the reach of Western categories of resolution" (Moody 119). The disconnected voices of the poem thus end not in despair but in a prayer for inner harmony—suggesting that Indic thought provided Eliot with a thought for expressing what Western modernism often found inexpressible. The central point, which the poem depicts "material richness but spiritual hollowness and the loss of the belief in religion and spirituality of the Wastelanders." (Bhatta 58) The title of the poem itself suggests that it is a symbolic title which means 'spiritually barren land' and the people of this land are facing spiritual hollowness. The poem is divided into five sections as 'The Burial of the Dead', 'A game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water' and 'What the Thunder Said'. Each section describes a particular theme. The first part of *The Waste Land*, "The Burial of the Dead," shows that life is meant for change and suffering, and nothing in this world lasts forever. The second part, "A Game of Chess," talks about people's endless and dirty sexual desires that never bring true satisfaction. "The Fire Sermon" teaches that peace and happiness can only come when one learns to control desires and stay detached from lust. "Death by Water" reminds us how meaningless human pride and wishes are, as everything eventually ends in death. Finally, "What the Thunder Said" tells us that only spiritual values can bring real transformation and renewal in life. In the end, Eliot turns to the

wisdom of the *Upanishads*, where he discovers the true solution to the confusion and emptiness of the modern world—the spiritual peace that comes from divine knowledge.

The poem's last section 'What the Thunder Said', Eliot uses the Sanskrit words "Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata," which mean "Give, sympathize, control." These words come directly from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (5.2.1). Eliot uses them to remind the modern reader that real salvation lies not in material pleasures but in spiritual self-control, compassion, and charity.

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* is one of the most philosophical and spiritually profound poems ever written in English literature. In this long poem, Eliot reflects deeply on the nature of time, eternity, and the relationship between human life and the divine. His approach to time shows the influence of both Western philosophy and Eastern, especially Indian, thought. Eliot's ideas about time are often compared to those found in ancient Hindu scriptures such as the *Upanishads* and *Yoga Sutras*.

In *Four Quartets*, Eliot presents his famous "theory of time." For him, time is not something that simply moves from past to present and then to future; instead, it is both temporary and eternal at the same time. He looks at time as a single, unified whole in which all moments—past, present, and future—exist together. This concept is beautifully expressed in the opening lines of "Burnt Norton":

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable." (Eliot 13)

Through these lines, Eliot shows that time is one continuous flow. The past and future are not separate from the present—they are all linked and co-exist. The present carries the past within it, and the future grows out of both. If we see time from a higher spiritual point of view, as Eliot suggests, then the divisions of past, present, and future disappear. Everything becomes part of a single eternal moment.

This idea is very similar to the Indian philosophical view of time found in Maharshi Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, where it is said that the past and future exist within the object at all times. According to this view, time is not a linear sequence but an eternal reality. In other words, the whole universe exists in a timeless state, and time only appears to move because of human perception.

Eliot's thought also resembles the French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of "la durée" or "duration." Bergson believed that real time is not something that can be measured by clocks; it is a continuous flow of experiences that exist in the human mind and consciousness. Eliot's idea that "all time is eternally present" clearly echoes Bergson's philosophy (Bergson 104).

Eliot's treatment of time also carries the tone of Advaita Vedanta, the Hindu philosophy of non-duality. According to Advaita, all distinctions—such as time, space, and individuality—are illusions (Maya). The only true reality is Brahman, the eternal, unchanging divine presence. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* says that the source of time and everything that exists is Brahman itself. Similarly, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* teaches that before creation, there was no time, no space, and no duality—only Brahman, the eternal existence (Radhakrishnan 78).

The cyclical concept of time is unmistakably Vedantic. It recalls the *Katha Upanishad's* vision of existence where temporal distinctions collapse into the eternal: *"There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the lightning—what to speak of this fire? By His light all this shines"* (2.2.15). Just as the Upanishads describe reality as beyond succession, Eliot affirms that past, present, and future are gathered into the eternal present. The still point—"the still point of the turning world"—suggests a transcendental

axis beyond flux, recalling the Upanishadic conception of an unmoving reality within movement. *Four Quartets* depicts his personal reminiscences in the most poetic language, transforming his personal reveries into universal philosophy" (Kukreti 107). The poet seems to lament the lost opportunities and can never overcome from the pain, "What might have been and what has been/ Point to one end, which is always present." (Eliot Four Quartets 171)

The central symbol of the "still point of the turning world" captures this union of movement and rest, becoming one of the most mystical images in modern poetry. For Eliot, the still point is the place where "past and future are gathered," yet it is also a point of eternal calm beyond flux. This strongly recalls the *Katha Upanishad's* teaching of the "unmoving One, swifter than the mind" (1.2.18), a reality at once transcendent and immanent. A. N. Dwivedi interprets this as Eliot's absorption of the Hindu concept of *Kala*, where time itself becomes "a mask of the Absolute" (Dwivedi 134).

Eliot's idea of time and eternity in *Four Quartets* connects beautifully with this Upanishadic truth. In the final poem, "Little Gidding," Eliot writes:

"What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from." (Eliot 59)

Through these lines, Eliot suggests that every end is also a new beginning. Life moves in circles, not straight lines. Birth and death, beginning and ending, are not opposites—they are one and the same reality seen from different points of view. This cycle of return and renewal resembles the Hindu idea of Samsara, the endless cycle of creation and dissolution that begins and ends in Brahman. For Eliot, time becomes the means through which the human soul can find its way to the eternal. By realizing that time is part of eternity, one can go beyond the illusion of change and reach a state of spiritual peace. This is exactly what the *Upanishads* and *Yoga Sutra* teach—that the goal of human life is to transcend time and realize the eternal Self.

In *The Dry Salvages*, T. S. Eliot turns toward ideas that come directly from the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of India's most influential spiritual texts. Eliot often drew from religious writings, and here he blends Hindu philosophy with his own reflections on time, duty, and spiritual growth. The opening of the section echoes the famous scene in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to act without worrying about rewards or results. Krishna explains that a person should perform the right action simply because it is right, not because they hope for success or fear failure (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.47). Eliot adapts this teaching to show that freedom from time's pressures comes only when one stops being anxious about outcomes.

For Eliot, time becomes a burden when people cling to future hopes or past regrets. But when someone performs their duty sincerely, without selfish motives, they lift themselves above that burden. This reflects Krishna's teaching that selfless action, done in a spirit of sacrifice, leads toward spiritual clarity. Eliot's use of this idea helps the reader see that the way to overcome the restlessness caused by time is to act with discipline and detachment. This is the same advice Krishna gives Arjuna, and Eliot re-shapes it to suit his modern spiritual meditation.

Throughout Eliot's writings, he often repeats this belief that time does not automatically heal suffering. When he writes, "Time is no healer," he reminds us that patience alone does not bring peace (*Dry Salvages*, section III). Instead, a person must act with insight and moral courage. This matches the *Gita's* teaching on Karma Yoga—the path of action—which insists that peace comes from duty performed without attachment (Radhakrishnan 67–70). Eliot's poem uses this principle to guide readers toward a quieter, more centered way of thinking.

Three ideas from the *Gita* play a major role in *The Dry Salvages*. The first is the contrast between the life of action and the life of contemplation. Krishna tells Arjuna that both paths can lead to spiritual realization, but action without attachment is the more suitable path for most people (*Bhagavad Gita* 3.7). Eliot leans on this idea to suggest that spiritual progress comes not from escaping responsibilities but from fulfilling them with integrity.

The second idea is Krishna's revelation of himself as both destroyer and preserver. In the *Gita*, Krishna shows his cosmic form, explaining that he is the force that creates, sustains, and ultimately destroys the world (11.32). Eliot uses this dual image to show that time is not only a gentle or healing presence—it also destroys. Yet, destruction and preservation together form a divine pattern. Recognizing this helps a person face change with steadiness instead of fear.

The third idea is the concept of the *Avatara,* the divine incarnation. In the *Gita,* Krishna appears in human form to guide and protect humanity during moments of confusion and crisis (4.7–8). Eliot uses this idea to remind readers that divine help can appear in many forms, especially when human beings lose their sense of direction. The poem suggests that spiritual guidance is never far away.

Because of these connections, *The Dry Salvages* becomes a deep allusion to the *Bhagavad Gita*. Eliot is not merely borrowing images; he is bringing forward the heart of the Gita's message: enlightenment arises from a calm mind, disciplined action, and freedom from selfish desire. This is why the poem tells the reader to consider both past and future with an equal mind. When Eliot describes standing "between the hither and the farther shore, while time is withdrawn," he points to a moment of spiritual insight where human life is seen not as a chain of gains and losses but as part of a larger reality.

T. S. Eliot is mainly known as a great modern poet, but his contribution to drama is also very important. His plays are serious and intellectual and deal with deep problems of life. Eliot himself said that he did not want to go deeply into Indian philosophy, yet many ideas from Indian thought appear naturally in his plays. *The Family Reunion* shows a clear influence of the *Bhagavad Gita,* especially the ideas of detachment, selfless action, suffering, and salvation. Through this play, Eliot tries to show that human life is often guided by illusion, ego, and false relationships, and true peace can be achieved only through spiritual understanding.

The Family Reunion centers on the Monchensey family. Harry Monchensey, the eldest son, returns to his ancestral house after many years. He is mentally disturbed, fearful, and full of guilt. His mother Amy is a dominating and possessive woman who wants to control Harry's life. Her love is selfish, as she wants her son to live according to her wishes. This kind of possessive love becomes a burden rather than a support. To escape from his mother's control, Harry marries a woman whom he does not truly love. However, his marriage also fails. His wife keeps him to herself only to satisfy her vanity and takes him to Europe and costly places of her own choice. This unhappy married life increases Harry's mental stress. When his wife dies mysteriously, his sense of guilt and fear becomes stronger. Thus, first his mother and then his wife imprison him emotionally and spiritually.

Harry's condition is similar to that of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna is confused and unwilling to fight when he sees his own relatives standing against him on the battlefield. He feels helpless and guilty. In the same way, Harry feels trapped by family ties and selfish relationships. He does not understand the purpose of his life. In the *Gita,* Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna the true meaning of action. He explains that one should perform one's duty without attachment to the results. This is called selfless or detached action (*nishkama karma*). Eliot uses this idea as the central theme of *The Family Reunion*.

In the play, Agatha, Harry's aunt, plays the role of a spiritual guide, just as Krishna guides Arjuna. She understands Harry's fear and guilt and helps him see the truth. Agatha tells Harry that relationships based on ego, possession, and selfish love only create suffering. She advises him to leave behind these false bonds

and go on a spiritual journey. Her words reflect the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Love compels cruelty to those who do not understand love" (Eliot). The meaning of this line is that true love may appear harsh, but it actually leads a person toward spiritual freedom.

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that the soul is immortal and cannot be destroyed. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna not to grieve for the body because the soul never dies (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.20). Similarly, Agatha frees Harry from his guilt by making him understand that his suffering comes from ignorance and attachment. She helps him realize that freedom from the past is freedom from karma. Harry himself admits that Agatha helped him overcome his childhood fears and illusions, which others ignored or explained away.

Indian philosophy also believes that the world is *maya*, or illusion. All worldly relationships are connected with the body, not with the soul. Eliot was aware of this idea, and it is clearly reflected in *The Family Reunion*. Amy's possessive motherhood, Harry's unhappy marriage, and the family's rigid traditions represent *maya*. These relationships bind Harry and prevent him from achieving peace. According to critic Subhash Sarkar, Eliot presents renunciation not as an escape from life but as a higher form of action (Sarkar 67). Damayanti Ghosh also points out that Eliot uses Indian philosophy to show suffering as a path toward self-realization rather than mere tragedy (Ghosh 54).

At the end of the play, Harry decides to leave his family and go on a lonely spiritual journey. This decision marks his movement toward redemption and salvation. Agatha supports his choice because she understands that this journey will free him from the bondage of ego and body. Like Arjuna, who finally acts after gaining spiritual knowledge, Harry also finds clarity and purpose through detachment. The play thus ends on a note of spiritual hope rather than despair.

In this way, *The Family Reunion* strongly reflects the influence of Indian philosophy, especially the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Through the character of Harry and the guidance of Agatha, Eliot presents the ideas of detached action, renunciation, and salvation. The play shows that true freedom comes not from controlling others or clinging to relationships, but from understanding the nature of life, performing one's duty selflessly, and moving toward spiritual truth.

T. S. Eliot's plays are not merely social dramas; they are deeply philosophical works that explore the spiritual crisis of modern human beings. Although Eliot is primarily known as a Christian poet and dramatist, many of his plays reflect strong parallels with Indian mystic philosophy, especially the ideas found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Eliot himself admitted that he did not consciously attempt to explain Indian philosophy in his works, yet his themes of detachment, renunciation, illusion, and the search for true meaning strongly resonate with Hindu thought. His play *The Cocktail Party* is a clear example of this influence, where the movement of the plot progresses from the physical and emotional level to the spiritual level through complex human relationships and inner conflict. Eliot's dramatic works also bear Indic echoes. In *The Cocktail Party* (1949), Celia Coplestone, dissatisfied with worldly love, seeks guidance from Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. Much like Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Celia is paralyzed by despair, and Reilly, akin to Krishna, reframes her suffering as a path to self-realization. Celia was heartbroken after Edward rejected her proposal of marriage which made her to realize that what she assumed as love was merely infatuation and that she was deceived by her lover. This process of her disillusionment led her to realize that the "entire world is an illusion (Maya) therefore it deceives man while he is fully awake". (Kukreti 115)

At the center of *The Cocktail Party* are Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne, a married couple whose relationship lacks genuine love. Their marriage represents the emptiness and emotional confusion of modern life. Edward's love is driven by ego and self-satisfaction, while Lavinia's affection is based on her own emotional needs. Neither of them is capable of selfless love. This selfish attachment mirrors what Indian philosophy describes as *avidya* or ignorance—attachment to false emotions and worldly expectations. Their suffering arises not from external problems but from their inability to transcend ego

and desire. Eliot uses their marriage to show how human relationships become hollow when they are based only on personal gain.

Although *The Cocktail Party* outwardly appears to have a Christian framework, its inner movement reflects Indian philosophical ideas, especially the concept of *Maya*. The world shown in the play—full of social gatherings, glamour, ambition, and emotional games—is not presented as real fulfillment. Instead, it is shown as an illusion that traps individuals in dissatisfaction. This idea is clearly expressed through the character of Celia Coplestone, whose spiritual journey forms the heart of the play.

Another important relationship in the play is between Peter Quilpe and Celia Coplestone. Peter, a film producer, claims to love Celia, but his love is motivated by ambition. He wants Celia to become a film actress, which would benefit his career. His affection is therefore conditional and self-serving. In contrast, Celia's love for Edward is genuine and selfless. She loves Edward not for gain but for emotional truth. However, when she realizes that Edward only uses her to satisfy his ego, she is deeply hurt. This realization causes a severe spiritual crisis in her life. She begins to question her own existence and the reality of the world around her.

Celia's confusion is expressed in one of the most important lines of the play:

"I accept that the world I live in seems all a delusion" (Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*).

This statement strongly echoes the Hindu concept of *Maya*, which describes the world as temporary, deceptive, and incapable of providing lasting satisfaction. According to Indian mystics, human suffering arises because people mistake this illusion for ultimate reality. Liberation is possible only through the knowledge of a higher truth. Celia's realization marks the beginning of her spiritual awakening. Unlike Edward and Lavinia, who return to social normalcy, Celia moves beyond the surface level of existence.

Celia's journey closely resembles that of an Indian spiritual seeker. Her suffering does not lead her to bitterness or escapism but to self-examination and spiritual longing. She is no longer satisfied with social success or emotional comfort. Her desire is now directed toward discovering the true meaning of life. This quest brings her under the guidance of Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, the psychiatrist, who functions not merely as a medical professional but as a spiritual guide.

Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly plays a role similar to that of Shri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Just as Krishna guides Arjuna during his moral and spiritual crisis, Sir Henry guides Celia during her inner confusion. He does not force her to choose a particular path; instead, he helps her understand the nature of her suffering and encourages her to exercise her free will. His guidance emphasizes that spiritual truth cannot be fully explained in words but must be experienced.

Sir Henry tells Celia:

"The destination cannot be described;
You will know very little until you get there;
You will journey blind" (Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*).

This passage reflects the Indian belief that spiritual realization cannot be achieved through logic alone. The seeker must move forward with faith, courage, and detachment. Like Krishna, Sir Henry reminds Celia that she must act without attachment to results. He makes her realize that her suffering is not meaningless but a necessary stage in her spiritual evolution.

Before Celia leaves for her final journey, Sir Henry blesses her with the words:

"Go in peace, my daughter.
Work out your salvation with diligence" (Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*).

This blessing strongly resembles the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna urges Arjuna to perform his duty with dedication while remaining detached from outcomes. The emphasis is on action (*karma*) guided by spiritual awareness rather than emotional desire. Celia accepts this path willingly, showing the importance of free will, which is a key concept in both Indian philosophy and Eliot's drama.

Celia's disillusionment with Edward acts as the catalyst for this shift. The collapse of her romantic ideal exposes the fragility of human desires and draws her toward the recognition of *Maya*, the illusory nature of worldly existence. In articulating her despair—"I have no delusions—/ Except that the world I live in seems as a delusion"—Celia voices a profoundly Vedantic insight. She recognizes that the world, with all its glittering promises, ultimately fails to satisfy the soul. In this, she echoes Krishna's reminder to Arjuna that *"the unreal has no being, and the real never ceases to be"* (2.16). Just as Arjuna learns to see beyond the immediate battle to the eternal truth, Celia too perceives her personal suffering as part of a larger spiritual reality.

What makes Celia a powerful symbol in Eliot's play is the way her journey culminates not in bitterness but in sacrifice. By choosing martyrdom, she embodies the Christian ideal of giving one's life for a higher cause. Yet this sacrifice is not simply a Western notion; it resonates with the Indic principle of *sannyasa* or renunciation, where one willingly lets go of the self and its attachments for the sake of truth. Thus, Celia becomes a figure of spiritual synthesis—her life and death reconcile Eastern detachment with Western devotion. Damayanti Ghosh rightly observes that Eliot "fuses Christian ascetic ideals with Indic concepts of renunciation, so that the dramatic narrative resonates with both traditions" (Ghosh 87).

In this way, Celia's martyrdom is not merely a tragic ending but a spiritual culmination. As Subhash Sarkar notes, Eliot's drama often "borrows from the Gita a sense of duty without attachment, where action becomes a vehicle of transcendence" (Sarkar 142). Celia, like Arjuna, learns that her suffering is not to be rejected but transformed. Her sacrifice is simultaneously a Christian act of witness and an Indic act of detachment.

As John D. Margolis insightfully observes, the play dramatizes "a reconciliation of Eastern detachment with Western martyrdom" (213). Celia's story, therefore, transcends cultural boundaries and speaks to the human condition itself: the restless search for meaning, the recognition of illusion, and the final surrender to a reality larger than the self. In her, Eliot shows how Indic wisdom can find a home within Christian mysticism, and how drama can embody not only psychological struggles but also the profound meeting of two great spiritual traditions.

Ultimately, Celia renounces all worldly desires and chooses a life of service. She leaves behind the false world of glamour and ambition and goes to serve people suffering from pestilence. This act of renunciation does not represent escape but spiritual fulfillment. Her acceptance of suffering and service reflects the idea of *nishkama karma*—selfless action—taught in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Through Celia, Eliot suggests that true meaning in life is found not in pleasure or success but in surrender to a higher purpose.

A similar philosophical structure is found in Eliot's earlier play *The Family Reunion*. In this play, the character of Agatha functions as a spiritual guide, much like Sir Henry in *The Cocktail Party*. Agatha helps Harry confront his inner guilt and spiritual fear. Both Agatha and Sir Henry resemble Krishna in their role as mentors who guide troubled souls toward self-realization. They do not remove suffering but help the characters understand its spiritual significance.

In both plays, Eliot presents the world as a place filled with illusion, confusion, and moral blindness. The characters who cling to social norms and emotional comfort remain trapped in this illusion. Those who accept suffering and seek deeper truth move toward salvation. This idea aligns closely with Indian mysticism, which teaches that liberation comes through awareness, detachment, and right action.

Although Eliot uses Christian symbols and language, his treatment of mysticism is deeply influenced by Oriental philosophy. The blending of Christian and Indian thought allows Eliot to address universal human concerns—existential anxiety, moral responsibility, and the search for meaning. By presenting spiritual guides like Agatha and Sir Henry, Eliot emphasizes the need for guidance on the spiritual path, just as Arjuna needed Krishna's counsel on the battlefield of life.

In this way, Eliot's poem becomes a meeting point between Western modernist poetry and Eastern spiritual wisdom. By turning to the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Eliot shows that selfless action, acceptance of the divine order, and inner discipline are the keys to rising above the anxiety of time. His poem gently leads the reader toward a clearer sense of what enlightenment means. *The Cocktail Party* and *The Family Reunion* reflect Eliot's profound engagement with Indian mystic philosophy, especially the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Through themes of illusion, detachment, free will, and selfless action, Eliot presents a vision of life where true fulfillment lies beyond material success and emotional attachment. His characters' journeys suggest that salvation is achieved not by escaping the world but by acting within it with spiritual awareness. Thus, Eliot's dramas stand as powerful examples of how Western Christian mysticism and Eastern philosophy can merge to address the deepest questions of human existence.

Conclusion

T.S. Eliot's legacy cannot be fully understood without recognizing the impact of Indic philosophy on his thought. From his student years at Harvard to his mature works, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita provided him with metaphors and structures to express the inexpressible: the nature of time, the distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the possibility of transcendence.

In The Waste Land, he invokes *shantih*; in Four Quartets, he meditates on time as eternal presence; in Ash Wednesday, he echoes the Upanishadic hierarchy of wisdom; and in The Cocktail Party, he dramatizes the spiritual guide as a modern Krishna figure. Eliot thus emerges not only as a Western modernist but as a poet of synthesis, whose vision unites East and West in a shared search for the eternal.

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