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In the Light of “The Bhagavad Gita”, a Study of T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets"

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Abstract:

The Bhagavad Gita, loosely translated as "the song of God," is a well-known classic in philosophy and religion that may also be analysed from a variety of different perspectives. As an indological study, the historical and linguistic characteristics of the Bhagavad Gita, as well as its dominant concepts, might be investigated and examined as a possible approach of understanding the Bhagavad Gita. T.S. Eliot, one of the most renowned modern poets, dramatists, and literary critics, was deeply influenced by the Gita once it gained a rapt audience in the West. Thus, an Indian thought entered the Western mind and inspired the German Romantics, particularly Humboldt and Goethe, as well as the American Transcendentalists, who felt that knowledge of God was a bridge to spiritual discoveries and the deepest of truths. These concepts thus transcended logic and reason, sticking to the virtues of individuality, idealism, and natural divinity. As a result, this dissertation aims to outline the key ideas and concepts presented in T.S. Eliot's The Four Quartets as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, idealism, indological study, influenced, Philosophy, transcendentalists, western mind.

Discussion:

The renowned classical treatise is part of the Mahabharata's Bhishma Parva and consists of a debate between the leader of the army, Arjuna, and his charioteer, cousin, and friend, Krishna. The discussion is 700 verses long and deals with theological and philosophical issues of the greatest level. The Bhagavad Gita was initially classified as an Upanishad and draws extensively from it. The term upanishad means "to sit close" and refers

to the transmission of knowledge or wisdom from a teacher or guru to a pupil. Arjuna bows himself to Lord Krishna's lotus feet in the Bhagavad Gita and accepts him as his teacher, the source of wisdom. The Lord enlightens him with cosmic and universal order teachings, showing him how to conduct activities while remaining detached from them. The Mahabharata, which constitutes only a small portion of the Bhagavad-Gita, sows the seeds of Krishna's ascension to dominance. It depicts Krishna as a majestic, all-powerful force who displays his cosmic form to Arjuna, his companion. The dramatic circumstances are the outcome of a protracted family feud. Large armies assemble on the battlefield of Kuruksetra, some in favour of either of the two familial lines, the Pandavas or Pandu's descendants, and others in defence of the Kauravas, Dhrtarastra's sons. Arjuna foresees the impending massacre and is hesitant to raise his weapons against his family, friends, and professors. "O Madhava, what prospect for pleasure remains now that we have slaughtered our own kin?" He intends to withdraw from the conflict and avoid retaliation against his nefarious cousins. However, he is ignorant at this moment because Krishna had already murdered them before meeting them on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Arjuna then seeks to Krishna for advice on what he perceives to be a serious issue, a moral quandary. In response to Arjuna, Krishna speaks the Bhagavad Gita, which includes dharma ideals for moral upliftment as well as the Upanisadic tradition, which calls for one to transcend beyond dharma and go beyond moral standards in a continual pursuit of self-realization. Moksha, then, aspires to a greater, imperishable perfection that ends the cyclic cycle of birth and death.

The Bhagavad Gita declares in Chapter III, verse 35:

“Shreyan Svadharmo Svanusthitat Paradharmat Vigunah

Svadharme nidhanam sreyaḥ paradharmo bhayavahah”(BG 3.35).

Even if one's own duty is unworthy, it is preferable to another's well-executed duty. Even death in the performance of one's own duty provides beatitude; death in the performance of another's duty brings anxiety. Dharma is a significant concept in the Bhagavad Gita, and it serves as the framework for subsequent conversations on Karma and the nature of good and negative karma. Dharma is essential to the Gita's teachings as well as Indian intellectual and religious beliefs. Arjuna's Dharma is that of a warrior, or Kshatriya, in the context of the Bhagavad Gita. It is his responsibility to fight and engage in battle. "Dharma aims to organise the universe via action; the Brahmin teaches and sacrifices, the Kshatriya reigns and defends, the Vaishya farms and trades, and the Sudra labours"

(Srivastava 79). The notion of Karma is also essential to the Bhagavad Gita, with consequences that extend beyond this life. The concept of action strengthens the concept of karma, which effects a person's life. Excellent deeds produce good outcomes, and the one who performs them is exalted. Bad behaviours, on the other hand, have repercussions that create suffering and drive him further into the existential root. In essence, every action is assumed to have both immediate and long-term implications. The concept of action is further subdivided into the ideals of action (karma) and inactivity (akarma), as well as the execution of inappropriate action (vikarma). "What exactly is action?" What exactly is "inaction"? Even the intelligent are perplexed about this. Now I will explain the subject of action to you; if you understand this, you will be free of evil. 'No matter how profound the route of action, one must first comprehend what action (karma) is, what wrong action (vikarma) is, and what inactivity (akarma) is.' (BG 4.16-17)

The Four Quartets embody Bhagavad Gita ideals. In *The Four Quartets*, Eliot, who was heavily influenced by Vedic thought and philosophy, touches on the principles of The Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita, widely regarded as one of the world's greatest literary and spiritual masterpieces, was his major source of inspiration, and he describes it as the "next best intellectual poetry to the Divine Comedy within my experience." The connection between the Divine Comedy and the Bhagavad-Gita has a direct impact on the Four Quartets. The core notion of the Four Quartets, according to George Williamson, is analogous to both Christian and Hindu philosophy, as in St. John of the Cross and The Bhagavad Gita. Although it is based on Christian theory and religion, it makes clear allusions to the Bhagavad Gita. *Four Quartets*, a collection of four poetry, was released over a six-year period. In 1963, a compilation of his early writings included the first poem, "Burnt Norton," which was followed by the performance of his famous drama "Murder in the Cathedral." The other three poems, named "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding," were written during WWII and published in 1940, 1941, and 1942, respectively. Each of these poems is divided into five distinct pieces. Man's relationship with time, the universe, and the divine is established as the fundamental topic of *Four Quartets*. It has philosophical, lyrical, and mystical components, as well as works from both Eastern and Western religious and cultural traditions, with references to both the Bhagavad Gita and St. John of the Cross.

The Bhagavad Gita is mentioned in the third quarter, *The Dry Salvages*.

"And do not think of the fruit of action.

Fare forward...

So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna

On field of battle."

The admonition of Arjuna is one of the key verses of the Bhagavad Gita:

“karmanyevadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana

ma karmaphalahetur bhur ma te sango'stvakarmani “(BG 2.47)

The Lord instructs Arjuna not to be sluggish, but to carry out his assigned duties without expecting a reward. One who is influenced by the outcome of his actions will never be able to follow the road of redemption; instead, he will become a slave. As a result, carrying out one's responsibilities and refusing any sort of idleness leads to emancipation. Inaction is as sinful as attachment to the result of activity on the path to spiritual redemption.

"Your company exists solely through its actions, never through its products." Then you will be liberated from the shackles of action. At the same time, do not become inactive (qtd. Balakrishnan 73).

Which is it right now: action or inaction?

"You can receive this: " In whatever sphere of being

The mind of man may be intent.

"At the time of death"—this is the one action

(And the time of death is every moment.)

Which shall fructify in the lives of others."

In *The Dry Salvages*, Eliot hints at the idea of Karma. He reiterates the notion of an individual soul committed to his required responsibilities, but he must avoid any sort of attachment to the outcome. The aforementioned excerpt from Eliot's *The Dry Salvages* emphasises Vedic philosophy's theoretical insights. In "Burnt Notion," Eliot presents the notion of "the still point," also known as Atman (the self), parama brahman (the Supreme Brahman), or Brahman in the Upanishads. In his poems, Eliot defines "the still point" in a variety of ways. "The still point" is Brahman/God, the source of everlasting calm. The first

portion begins with the connotation of time and its nature, which comprises present, past, and future moments all at once. One condition fades, and the notion of another period emerges.

“bhutagramah sa evayam bhutva bhutva praliyate

ratryagame vasah partha prabhavatyaharagame” (BG 8.19).

The living souls are elevated from their unmanifest existence to their manifest state at the start of Brahma's Day, and as darkness comes, they consolidate back into their unmanifest nature. During Brahma's Day, all living creatures are confined to their material natures, and when the cosmic night arrives, they are all destroyed and become unmanifest. Thousands of entities are born and then annihilated in this manner. Only through concentrating on Krishna awareness is it possible to gain immortality in time.

“avyakto ‘ksara ity uktas

tam ahuh paramam gatim

yam prapya na naivartante

tad dhama paramam mama” (BG 8.21).

Avyakta means "unmanifest." The Supreme Abad is described in the Bhagavad Gita as unmanifest and infallible. According to a vivid portrayal in the Bhagavad-samhita, there is nothing higher than the Supreme Lord's home, and that abode is the ultimate goal. (Purushan na param kincit sa akstha param gatih. When one achieves it, he never returns to the earthly world.

This aspect of time is portrayed in Eliot's "Burnt Norton," in which he builds an unbreakable link between the past, present, and future:

“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.”

Time becomes a major subject in "Burnt Norton," and it is linked to human salvation. It emphasises how the present and past are always bits and pieces of the future. On the literal level, it means that only man has authority over the present, and on a metaphorical one, one's acts may be rendered purposeful only via God as deliverer. Time is perceived from two perspectives: temporal, which accounts for the flux of events, and timeless and eternal, which explains the idea of absolute time. Eliot's view of time is of a sequential past, present, and future; all time is considered as contemporaneous. Time has no beginning, middle, or end that can be assigned. It is impossible to predict where it will begin, where it will go, or where it will conclude. However, because it is universal time, we may conclude that the centre contains everything of the past, present, and future. The opening five lines of "Burnt Norton" demonstrate this cyclic temporal concurrence. At the core is the absolute time presented as a timeless notion. It is essentially a point of emission, or the compression of the past, present, and future. Eliot presents the concept in the first five lines of "Burnt Norton" that the present and past are already shards of the future, which is resolved by what has happened in the past, and therefore all temporal experiences are part of the present. When viewed from a higher reality, the flux of time is "the domain of pure possibilities," pointing to the ever-present "Eternal or Timeless in the flux," which is a source of clarification of that flux. The thoughts communicated by Krishna to Arjuna in Section III of "Dry Salvages" are the most significant and frequently referenced from the Bhagavad Gita in Eliot's writing. These concepts revolve around the interplay of time and the inevitability of action. It describes the requirement for the doer to be selfless in his everyday responsibilities and to achieve a heightened consciousness at the time of his death, since this decides reincarnation.

The Four Quartets also addresses the issue of action in life and death over which humans have no control. Eliot draws direct references to the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads throughout the poem. Eliot contrasts components of life and death, which are also found in Vedic thinking and the Upanishads and deal with creation and end. This notion is metaphorically represented in "The Dry Salvages" by the image of a rock in the water that works as both a preserver and a destroyer at various times different moments:

“On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,

In navigable weather it is always a seamark

To lay a course by: but in the sombre season

Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.”

Eliot's reference of Lord Krishna clearly emphasises the concept of a timeless reality that works as both everlasting preserver and destruction. Furthermore, it alludes to the recurring notion of the oneness of all time in eternity, in which time is not divided into past, present, and future. The Supreme Lord's form in the Gita is the all-devouring power, which is also present in the form of all-devouring time. There appears to be no fundamental distinction between the idea of time and Godhead's absolute personhood. Surrender to Him, then, would guarantee liberation from the wheel of time and transcendental bliss. "Surrender all responsibilities to Me, and seek safety in Me alone." (BG 18.66.). "With all your being, Arjuna, seek shelter in Him; with His kindness, you will gain absolute tranquillity and an eternal dwelling" (BG 18.62).

The Lord informs Arjuna in the sixth couplet of Chapter VIII of the Bhagavad Gita, "thinking of whatsoever thing one departs the body at the time of death, that and that alone he attains, being eternally engaged in its mind."

“yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajatyante kalevaram

tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada-tad-bhava-bhavitah” (BG 8.6)

In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot expresses a similar sentiment: "At the moment, which is not of action or inaction,

You can receive this: “On whatever sphere of being

The mind of man may be intent

At the time of death”—that is the one action

(And the time of death is every moment)

Which shall fructify in the lives of others.”

However, Eliot does not limit himself to the theoretical concept of the soul as "unborn, immortal, and everlasting," or the effectiveness of man's acts in deciding release from time. By adhering to the inclusion principle, he broadens the scope of his ideas. The core idea of Maya is associated with the portrayal of time as a cycle or an ever-revolving wheel. Time unfolds as present, past, and future in its cyclical movement, and this

changeability of time and events is held in the illusion of absolute time. This is characteristic of "humankind," which "cannot tolerate a lot of reality" (Burnt Norton, I, 45–6). This conviction and portrayal of reality is founded on the Maya notion, which recognises humans as being prone to perceiving reality when blinded by illusion. The material universe, according to Vedanta, is an illusion that lives in ignorance. It does, however, have its own identity in the shape of Prakriti, which is the domain of time and allows for "just a little consciousness" (Eliot 16). As Narayan Shastri believes, this realm is filled with the all-pervading, timeless Brahman, which imparts worth and purpose to the world-in-time. Eliot's claim that "to be conscious is not to be in time" appears to be based on the Bhagavad Gita, which portrays knowledge (consciousness) as the finest path to self-realization or union with God—the "still centre."

Conclusion:

T.S. Eliot foresees and ultimately realises an enlivened world in the Four Quartets. The collection's four poems share a common theme: man's relationship with time, the cosmos, and the Supreme Being. They are rich in spiritual, intellectual, and lyrical components, as well as many references to the Bhagavad-Gita and the essential truths it proposes. There is a cohabitation of past, present, and future, with previous recommendations flowing into the future and future proposals pouring into the present. Eliot brings together two diametrically opposed concepts: time and eternity. He wants to find eternity, the genesis of time, the point where time does not exist, and the location where time is created. Furthermore, he describes time as everlasting and omnipresent, as well as unredeemable. It is unredeemable since life is eternal and eternity is a completed condition that requires no redemption. It is also irredeemable because to its destructive nature; time cannot redeem it; it can only lead to change.

“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's idea of time is a linear series of the past, present, and future; all time is considered contemporaneous. *Four Quartets*, a collection of four poems, supports this convergence of cyclic time: *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages*, and *Little Giddings*. The allusions to Lord Krishna as the everlasting preserver and destroyer strengthen Eliot's vision of a timeless existence.

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