

THE QUEST FOR THE ESSENCE IN T. S. ELIOT'S WRITINGS: AN
UPANISADIC READING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of
Tribhuvan University in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ENGLISH

By

DAMARU CHANDRA BHATTA

TU Reg. No. 15473-86

Ph.D. Reg. No. 18/073

Tribhuvan University

Kathmandu, Nepal

February 2021

Letter of Recommendation

We certify that this dissertation entitled **The Quest for the Essence in T. S. Eliot's Writings: An Upani adic Reading** was prepared by Damaru Chandra Bhatta under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examinations by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy** in **English**.

Dissertation Committee:

Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Shreedhar Gautam

Co- Supervisor

Date: -----

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Office of the Dean
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Ref.

Approval Letter

This dissertation entitled **The Quest for the Essence in T. S. Eliot's Writings: An Upaniadic Reading** submitted by **Mr. Damaru Candra Bhatta** for final examination to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English**. I hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality and has therefore accepted for the degree.

Prof. Kushum Shakya, PhD

Dean and Chairperson

Research Committee

Date:

Declaration

I hereby declare that this Dissertation is my own work and that it contains no materials previously published. I have not used its materials for the award of any kind of other degree. Where other authors' sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Damaru Chandra Bhatta

Date: -----

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor and co-supervisor Professor Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma and Professor Dr. Shreedhar Gautam respectively. They guided me authoritatively in every step of my research and helped me prepare this thesis. I would like to acknowledge my internal evaluators Professor Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, Head of the Central Department of English, and Professor Dr. Dhruba Bahadur Karki. Similarly, my sincere thanks go to my internal pre-viva examiner Dr. Anju Gupta, external examiner Professor Dr. Mohan Prasad Lohani, and external and viva examiner Prof. Dr. Arun Gupto for their insightful suggestions.

Professor Dr. Beerendra Pandey, member of the Central Department of English are praiseworthy for their full supports to my research and writing. I am indebted to Professor Dr. Ram Chandra Paudel, Dean of the Open University, for his constant encouragement to complete my research work.

I am indebted to my guru Professor Dr. Shreedhar Prasad Lohani for inspiring me writing this dissertation ever since I was preparing my proposal. Professor Lohani's thoughtful ideas and research skills helped me organize my dissertation into a fine shape. Similarly, I would like to appreciate Professor Dr. Dayaram Shrestha for his invaluable intellectual help to me.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Dr. Amma Raj Joshi and Professor Dr. Neelam Kumar Sharma for their contributions to the preparation of this dissertation.

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Dr. Ananda Sharma, Professor Dr. Anirudra Thapa, and Professor Dr. Dhruba Karki for their invaluable suggestion and guidelines to investigate into the subject of my research. Dr. Hari Adhikari, Ratna

Rajya Laxmi Campus, deserves praise for his friendly supports. Likewise, I am thankful to Dr. Iswari Pandey, Director of the English Program in Business and Professional Communication at California State University, Northridge, USA, for sending me relevant materials to carry out my research work.

I would like to give many thanks to Professor Dr. Pradeep Bahadur Neupane, the Ex-campus Chief of Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, and Associate Professor Dr. Pradeep Kumar Giri, the Head of English Instruction Committee of Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, for their invaluable cooperation to my studies.

I cannot forget the support of Dean Prof. Dr. Kushum Shakya and the Assistant Deans Prof. Dr. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, Dr. Chiranjibi Acharya, and Dr. Govinda Prasad Sharma of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. I appreciate Mr. Somraj Pandey, Mr. Vijay Ghimire, Mr. Krishna Karki, and Mr. Samrit Tandukar of this faculty for their technical and administrative supports to me.

I owe overwhelmed debt of gratitude to my father Professor Dr. Ram Chandra Bhatta for his constant encouragement and wise guidance. Similarly, I am obliged to Mohan Kumar Pokharel, Lecturer of English, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Dharan, who helped me transliterate Sanskrit words into English.

I am grateful to Beni Madhav Lekhak, my wife's elder brother, his son Birat Lekhak, Puspa Raj Pant, the husband of my sister Shanti Bhatta, and my brother Gopal Prasad Bhatta, all of whom sent me the reference books from abroad.

Lastly, I would also like to appreciate my spouse Kalyani Bhatta, Lecturer of English, Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, and my two sons Umanga and Utsah Bhatta, for creating sound academic environment at home.

Thank you!

Damaru Chandra Bhatta

Abstract

This research aims at studying about the quest for the Essence in T. S. Eliot's two poems *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, and two poetic plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* from the Upaniadic insights with special focus on non-duality in the given primary texts under scrutiny. The quest for the Essence is the quest for enlightenment, Brahma, or liberation from the cycle of life and death, and suffering. For the Upaniadic reading of the texts, mainly four Upaniadic insights such as *karma* and rebirth, the spiritual quest theme, *ātman* (the True Self) and Brahma, and their oneness (non-duality), and the attainment of the Essence through knowledge and self-realization, and symbols such as the Wheel, water including the river and the sea, and the still point described in the eleven primary Upaniads of the perennial Vedic philosophy were employed. This study investigated how the Essence (Brahma and *mokṣa*) can be attained in life time itself and disclosed that It can be attained through self-knowledge (spiritual knowledge, self-enquiry) and self-realization (the inner transformation of ideas). This disclosure is the main argument/claim or thesis of this research.

This research work addressed the following questions in relation to the primary texts studied: (a) what does “the Wheel” mean symbolically in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion* (b) why does Eliot use the symbol of “water” in his *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*? Finally, (c) How does Eliot quest for *ātman* and Brahma (the Essence) and establish their oneness in his *Four Quartets*?

Corresponding to the questions, the objectives are to: (a) explore the symbolic meaning of “the Wheel” in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion*; (b) analyze the symbolic use of “water” in Eliot's *The Waste Land*

and *Four Quartets*; and (c) identify the quest for *Atman* and Brahma (the Essence) and establish their oneness through “the still point” in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*.

For the purpose of the theoretical and conceptual approach, the Upaniadic insights derived from the eleven principal Upaniads were employed. As part of the Upaniadic insights, four major insights or theories used in this study are: *karma* determines one’s rebirth; the (internal) spiritual quest as the final purpose of life; *Atman* is Brahma (non-duality); and the attainment of the Essence through knowledge and self-realization. For example, *Brihad Aranyaka* and *Chandogya* Upaniads teach that one is born according to one’s *karma* (4.4.5-6; 3.14.1). *Katha* and *Brihad Aranyaka* Upaniads indicate that the ultimate goal of life is to attain the Essence that is known as Brahma (1.3.14, 1.3.28). *Chandogya* and *Brihad Aranyaka* Upaniads present the principle of non-dualism that *Atman* is Brahma (6.8.7; 1.4.10); the Ultimate Essence is only one, not two (non-dual); and all of this world is Brahma (*Chandogya* 6.2.1, 3.14.1). Similarly, *Brihad Aranyaka Upani ad* suggests that knowledge (theoretical learning of the Self) is important, but self-realization (putting knowledge into practice) is more important to quest for the Essence and liberation (4.5.6).

As Chapter Three in this study shows, Eliot uses the symbol of the Wheel in *The Waste Land*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* to suggest that the cycle of *karma* and rebirth continues unless attaining liberation. Our present life is an outcome of our past *karma* or programming. Similarly, our present *karma* (free will) determines or programs our future life as well. *Karma* (action) is the divine law of cause and effect. *Karma* is the belief that all thoughts and actions have results. *Karma* and knowledge are opposite to each other. *Karma* cannot conduct to *moksha* (liberation from the Wheel of life and death, freedom from suffering, enlightenment). Selfish and

attached *karma* causes rebirth whereas spiritual knowledge leads to *moksha* and immortality. So, Eliot advises us not to think of the fruit of action but to continue our duties of life without any attachment as right action is freedom. Our last desires or thoughts at the time of death determine our rebirth or liberation. If we think of Brahma, we attain Brahma, or if we think of the world, we return to the world.

On the one hand, Eliot's characters of lower type are subject to the cycle of *karma* and rebirth. They are not aware of the fact that the cause of their suffering and bondage is their desire to cling to the physical pleasures of life. On the other hand, the characters of higher type such as Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, Archbishop Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Harry, Mary and, Agatha in *The Family Reunion* attempt to be free from the bondage of life by seeking recourse to the spiritual knowledge of the Self.

As Chapter Four in this study shows, Eliot uses the symbol of "water" in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* to represent the sense of spirituality, Brahma, liberation, "Shanti" (Peace), and the purpose of the *jivātman's* (individual self's) spiritual journey to quest for the Essence. In *The Waste Land*, there is no water. That is, there is spiritual dryness. So, the wastelanders are in search of water, Shanti, and human, moral, and spiritual values. People are dying due to the scarcity of water. They are without spirituality due to the effect of materialism. Lovers and beloveds are stuck to their daily mechanical life of love and sex. They lack the spiritual water. Debased lovers and beloveds are burning due to lack of the spiritual water of self-control and asceticism. Tiresias, a pilgrim, goes to the chapel in search of water, and the thunder speaks the mantras of *Brihad ranyaka Upaniṣad*: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Dāmyata" instructing humanity to be generous, merciful and self-controlled in order to establish peace that ensures liberation.

Four Quartets presents water as a symbol of spirituality. Liberation can be attained through the knowledge of water. A dry pool is filled with water out of sunlight and a lotus rises out of heart of light. This symbolic, mystic vision suggests that one can enjoy divine bliss even in an unfavorable situation when one is illumined by the spiritual insight while meditating on light (consciousness, the Self, Brahma). Eliot warns those people who are eating and drinking for dung and death only. The world is like the sea full of bondage and suffering. People must cross this sea carefully if they want spiritual liberation. The river (*tm*) is within us and the sea (the Universal *tm* or Brahma) is everywhere in the universe. This kind of spiritual knowledge leads to spiritual liberation.

Eliot expresses the unknowability of gods and the river. The river is a strong brown god representing Lord *iva* (God of death, transformation, purification, growth) or Brahma and whose knowledge leads to spiritual emancipation. The sea (Brahma, inner consciousness) is a judge that gives good or bad results to every person as per his or her *karma*. Our life is like the longest river that flows to find its original source, i.e., the sea. The journey of life becomes complete when we find our home, i.e., Brahma. Thus, Eliot searches for water or the Essence of life in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*.

As Chapter Five in this study shows, Eliot uses the symbol of “the still point” to represent the quest for *tm* and Brahma (the Essence) and their oneness in *Four Quartets*. “The still point” means *tm* (the Self) or Brahma (the Universal Self) or both, and liberation as well. Eliot suggests the idea of the oneness of *tm* and Brahma through his witty, paradoxical expression, “the fire and the rose are one [and the same].” For an enlightened person, past, present, and future become one (“the still point”); the beginning and the end become one. There is nothing else except “the still

point” in the universe. “The still point” can be obtained through the knowledge of one’s divine existence and self-realization. Before this self-realization, one needs to practice renunciation, asceticism, detachment, and dispassion. Once one attains “the still point,” he or she becomes liberated from the Wheel of life and death. Thus, “the still point” and the Wheel are related to each other.

The divine bliss is found inside one's heart where "the still point" is. The wisdom of humility or devotion is endless and opens the door of “the still point.” Similarly, selfless *karma* can help us attain “the still point.” The real knowledge is the knowledge of “the still point” that creates spiritual unity amidst diversity in the world. Finally, knowing oneself as “the still point” is the crux of spiritual knowledge. This kind of non-dual knowledge is the key to enlightenment and liberation. Eliot wants to convey this message of non-duality through the quest for the Essence in his selected writings. This shows his opposition to the dualistic philosophy of the Western mind.

In a nutshell, the poems and plays of Eliot discussed in this study show the importance of spiritual knowledge and self-realization in attaining “the still point” and permanent liberation from the Wheel of life and death during the quest for the Essence. Knowledge is important, but self-realization is more important because without self-realization “the still point” cannot be attained. Thus, the Upaniadic concepts related to the quest for the Essence, the Wheel of *karma* and rebirth, the non-dual principle of the oneness between the Self (*ātman*) and the Universal Self (Brahma) represented by “the still point,” and self-realization are intimately related to each other. The knowledge of these spiritual concepts and their practice is significant for humanity in order to establish peace, bliss, and unity among diversity in the world.

Table of Contents

Letter of Recommendation	ii
Approval Letter	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v-vi
Abstract	vii-xi
Table of Contents	xii
Chapter One: Tracing Upaniadic Vision in T. S. Eliot's Writings	1-33
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	34-78
Chapter Three: The Symbolic Meaning of "the Wheel" in Eliot's <i>The Waste Land</i> , <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> , and <i>The Family Reunion</i>	79-109
Chapter Four: The Symbolism of "Water" in Eliot's <i>The Waste Land</i> and <i>Four Quartets</i>	110-145
Chapter Five: The Quest for Ātmā and Brahma (the Essence) and their Oneness through "the Still Point" in Eliot's <i>Four Quartets</i>	146-204
Chapter Six: The Attainment of the Essence (Brahma and Mokṣha) through Self-knowledge and Self-realization in Eliot's Writings	205-219
Appendix I: Vowel Alphabets of Sanskrit Transliteration	220
Appendix II: Consonant Alphabets of Sanskrit Transliteration	221-22
End Notes	223
Works Cited	224-231