

# Water as a Symbol of “Shāntih” in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: An Upanishadic Reading

Damaru Chandra Bhatta  
Tribhuvan University, Tri-Chandra Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Abstract**—This paper tries to explore *jīvātmas*’ (souls’ or individual selves’) spiritual journey from bondage to liberation for “Shāntih” (Peace), especially represented by the symbol of water in T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* from the viewpoint of the principal Upanishads. The ultimate goal of life is to attain “Shāntih,” Brahman, or *moksha* (liberation). This is symbolized through the search for water in the poem. Thus, the search for water is the search for “Shāntih.” The poem is influenced by the fundamental concept of the Upanishads that it is impossible to attain *moksha* without breaking the ignorance or the materialistic thinking that we are body and mind, made especially for sexual pleasures. We need to follow the eternal teachings of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad—give charity or donation (“Datta”), be kind (“Dayadhvam”), and control yourself (“Dāmyata”)—to achieve liberation from different kinds of sufferings as expressed in the poem. Eliot suggests that the knowledge and implementation of these spiritual values could help humanity to be free from the bondage of mundane desires, which are the causes of sufferings. Thus, this paper tries to analyze the poem from the viewpoint of the principal Upanishads to widen the horizon of knowledge for the benefit of humankind and to understand Eliot scholarship by crossing the boundaries of the Western culture.

**Index Terms**—bondage, ignorance, knowledge, liberation, Upanishad

## I. INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* (1922) meditates on the eternal values of life. He uses the terms “water” and “river” as major symbols to represent *jīvātmas*’ (individual selves’ or souls’) spiritual or cosmic journey from materiality to spirituality (the Reality, the Essence), from bondage to liberation, or from misery to happiness for “Shāntih” (Peace). Impermanence, flux/change, universal and endless suffering, and transitoriness are the attributes of bondage, which trap human beings in the tyrannical cycle of time as in the cycle of life and death. Eternal Peace, freedom, and happiness are the attributes of *moksha* (liberation). Craving for worldly pleasure, delusion, carnal desires, egoism, sensuality, and sexuality trap human beings in materiality.

Actually, bondage and materiality are interconnected. Similarly, spirituality and liberation are interconnected. The realization of the Reality (Ātmā and Brahman) and the attainment of “Shāntih” are the goals of spirituality from the viewpoint of the Upanishads. *The Waste Land* is really dry, barren, and waste due to the lack of water. Metaphorically, the modern people living in the wasteland are spiritually hollow and corrupt. They have no faith in Brahman/God and spiritual values. Now, they need water, i.e., spiritual Peace. So, they are searching for water. Thus, the search for water is the search for “Shāntih” in Eliot’s four poems under *The Waste Land*. His literary characters try to free themselves from the entanglements of universal bondage and gross materiality through the universal teachings of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad of the Hindu philosophy.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to explore in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* the theme of bondage and liberation in terms of the ten principal Upanishads: Īshāvāsyā, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Māndukya, Taittirīya, Shvetāshvatara, Chhāndogya, and Brihadāranyaka. Similarly, the objective of this paper is to explore how universal bondage or suffering could be ended and how “Shāntih” or liberation could be attained through asceticism, renunciation, dispassion, generosity, kindness, and self-control as suggested by Eliot (1967) through *The Waste Land*, which consists of a group of five poems: “The Burial of the Dead,” “A Game of Chess,” “The Fire Sermon,” “Death by Water,” and “What the Thunder Said.”

## III. SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this paper lies in its academic intellectuality in using the ideas of the Upanishads to explore the spiritual journey motif as found in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Human beings are trapped in different sorts of bondage and ignorance from the beginning of the creation. Philosophers and poets have been trying to alleviate human beings’ suffering from such bondage and ignorance for their liberation. Eliot seems to be both a poet and philosopher, attempting to find the solutions for the eternal problems of human beings’ bondage in terms of the Upanishadic reflections. The main bondage is to die and be born endlessly. Its main cause is ignorance.

Thus, ignorance is a problem: knowledge is its solution. Meditation on the Reality, on the briefness of human life, and on the futility of the worldly pursuits and vanities with the help of spiritual knowledge by observing the eternal virtues of righteousness is one Upanishadic method or means to solve the problem. In this context, this paper tries to explore the need of spiritual journey in order to go from materiality to spirituality for attaining "Shāntih" in the context of Eliot's deep mediation on the predicament of the eternal suffering of human beings.

#### IV. THEORETICAL GROUNDING OF THE STUDY: THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY MOTIF

From the viewpoint of Hume (2012), "The Upanishads are the first recorded attempts of the Hindus at systematic philosophizing" (p. 17). They are also called Vedānta (the ending parts of the four Vedas). They are about Ātmā, Brahma, and liberation. They guide us as to how we can be free from all sorts of human sufferings. Bhatta (2015) remarks that the Upanishads were not created by any persons. Even Brahma (the Universal Self, the Essence, or the Ground of all existence) or God did not create them. So, the Upanishads are called *apaurusheya*, not created by any persons, Brahma, or God either (pp. 21-23). Actually, they came out of the exhalation of Brahma (Bṛihadāranyaka 2:4:10, 4:5:12). Therefore, there is no author of the Upanishads. They existed in the oral form since time immemorial. Nearly 5000 years ago, they were recorded in the written form.

According to the principal Upanishads, which are used as the methodological tools for this study, the causes of human suffering are craving and delusion. The cause of craving and delusion is the ignorance of one's divine spiritual nature. The cause of ignorance is the lack of spiritual knowledge. When we realize the transitoriness and meaninglessness of all worldly phenomena in contrast to the immortal existence of our Self, we become free from ignorance and bondage. Then we wake up from our dreaming state of sleep. The practice of the eternal virtues or values such as generosity, mercy, and self-restraint is desirable as prequalification to become free from bondage (the cycle of life and death) and suffering. We need to proceed on the spiritual journey till we attain *moksha* (permanent liberation from the material existence and all sorts of sufferings). Only then we can attain permanent "Shāntih." For this purpose, as Radhakrishnan (2012) remarks, spirituality inspires human beings to give up the materialistic viewpoint because this viewpoint holds only a transient value for individual selves (p. 797-98).

All the references to the Upanishads used throughout this article are taken from Radhakrishnan's book *The Principal Upanishads*, 2012. Similarly, all the in-text citations of Eliot mentioned in this article are from his book *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*.

#### V. WATER: A SYMBOL OF SPIRITUAL JOURNEY FROM BONDAGE TO LIBERATION FOR "SHĀNTIH"

Eliot shows individual selves' spiritual journey from bondage to liberation or from materiality to spirituality (the Essence) for attaining "Shāntih" by using the symbols of water and river in his poem *The Waste Land*. The inhabitants of *The Waste Land* suffer from the lack of spiritual water. They are subject to the anxiety of transitoriness, impermanence, fleeting life, psychological pain, craving, illusion, bondage, and the cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation, metempsychosis, transmigration of a *jīvātma*). So, they make an attempt to be free from their bondage and materiality (worldly life and mundane experience, thought, or belief) through the knowledge of spirituality. Though they know that asceticism, renunciation, dispassion, self-reflexivity, and the observance of the three cardinal virtues of life such as generosity, kindness, and self-discipline are the means to attain the spiritual ends, they fail to abide by them.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* is influenced by the eternal themes of the Upanishads regarding the concepts of bondage and liberation. The Katha Upanishad expresses that all the worldly or material pleasures are transitory. The pleasures are futile and insignificant. Life is brief. Even the great length of life is insufficient to enjoy the pleasures. The transitory pleasures weaken the power of the mind and senses. Human beings are never satisfied with wealth. They are subject to decay and death (1:1:26-28). They are born, get old, and die repeatedly as a corn is born out of its seed and vice versa in its regular cycle of nature (1:1:6). The Chhāndogya Upanishad expresses that this body is mortal, engulfed by death but the Self is immortal without a body (8:12:1).

Similarly, the Mundaka Upanishad expresses that our life and the world are temporary like the cobweb of a spider (1:1:7). They are fleeting like the sparks of fire—*visphulingāh* (2:1:1). The fruits of the deeds done with a motive or self-interest cannot bestow eternal satisfaction and happiness because the fruits are impermanent. Brahma cannot be achieved through the deeds performed with a hope of results (1:2:12). In fact, there is no liberation without the knowledge of the Reality and the abandonment of attachment and unequal feeling towards others. The Reality is that every human being himself or herself is nothing other than Brahma (the Cosmic Self). These Upanishadic ideas find their treatment in *The Waste Land*, which will be analyzed below in proper contexts.

*The Waste Land* draws on Eliot's spiritual autobiography. It echoes his marital problems, anxieties, failures, temptations, and low self-esteem. Drabble writes, "Eliot was formally separated from his first wife (whose ill health, both physical and mental, had caused him much stress and misery) in 1932-3; she died in 1947" (2008, p. 322) in a mental institution. Despite being autobiographical, the poem is truly universal at its essence because it also echoes the spiritually philosophical thoughts of the principal Upanishads including the Bṛihadāranyaka one.

Mackean argues that Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land* has five sections, which "are structured on a system of fragmented discontinuity, reflecting the discordant experience of modern secular man" (2005, p. 39). In them, Eliot's

"reliance on allusion to cosmopolitan mythology [especially the Upanishadic mythology] and the liberal use of foreign words [especially the Sanskrit words]" are noticeable. They present the "predicament of man searching for salvation [*moksha* in terms of the Upanishads]" (2005, pp. 38-39). The inhabitants of *The Waste Land* are bound to the eternal cycle of life and death. The eternal cycle of bondage turns the land to an eternal wasteland, which could be fertile only with the observance of the eternal principles of the Upanishads.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* presents the modern world as fragmented, disconnected, and incoherent due to the devastating result of World War I, the rise of the scientific materialism, and the loss of the age-old spiritual, moral, and human values. Towards the end of the poem, he presents a hope of order and resolution with the *mantras* of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Dāmyata. / Shāntih shāntih shāntih" ("What the Thunder Said," p. 50) though "London bridge is falling down, falling down" (p. 50). "Datta" means to give; "Dayadhvam" means to show mercy; and "Dāmyata" means to control one's body and mind. The ironical thing is that everyone desires Peace and happiness but no one is ready to observe religious and spiritual practices for achieving that Peace. Peace and happiness follow not from materiality, miserliness, insensitiveness, blind surrender to desires, sexual freedom, and secularism but from spirituality, charity, piety, kindness, self-discipline, righteousness, and cosmopolitanism. In other words, one can attain "Shāntih" not through miserliness, violence, and self-indulgence or licentiousness but through generosity, mercy, and self-control.

*The Waste Land* presents a paradoxical picture of death-in-life. Death and life are polar opposites. Though modern people are materialistically rich and psychically sighted and strong, they are spiritually poor, dead, blind, and impotent. This is hinted by Eliot's invocation of the Cumaean Sibyl myth in the initial epigraph of *The Waste Land* (p. 37). He warns the inhabitants of the wasteland to be far from materiality. Sri (1985) remarks that the Cumaean Sibyl was "the famous ancient Greek prophetess, whom Apollo granted a life of as many years as she had grains of dust in her hand. She forgot to ask, however, for eternal youth and so shrank away to nothing. She hung in a jar and when asked, 'What do you want?' She replied, 'I want to die'" (p. 23). Nevertheless, she could not die according to her desire until she exhausted the fruits of her *karma*.

*The Waste Land* is waste both physically and spiritually. The wastelanders are suffering from the lack of rain or water. So, they need water. Water is Brahma as declared by Chhāndogya Upanishad (7:10:2). When one attains Brahma, he or she gets eternal "Shāntih" or *moksha*. Thus, water is a metaphor for Peace or liberation. Besides, water is a metaphor for rebirth and regeneration of the forgotten spiritual and moral values of life. Since modern people have forgotten such values of life, they are unrestful. As a result, now they need "Shantih" symbolized by water here. Only water can change the wasteland into a fertile one. Water has a purifying power. It can purify both body and mind. It is nectar for the whole creatures because it gives life. It is one of the five elements such as sky, air, fire, water, and earth created by Brahma (Taittiriya 2:1:3).

Symbolically, water revives people to life from their spiritual death. But in *The Waste Land*, time is without liberating water: "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water" ("The Burial of the Dead," p. 38). Here, water represents the human, moral, and spiritual values of life which are to be followed to get "Shāntih." But the modern people of the wasteland lack these values. More importantly, they have forgotten Brahma, their original source of life. Eliot suggests this message with the phrase, "no sound of water." This further suggests that they have no memory of being Brahma any longer now; they have forgotten this truth of their divine origin. This forgetfulness of one's divine nature causes human suffering.

Due to the lack of water, the land of *The Waste Land* is waste, barren, or infertile. The wastelanders want water but do not get it because they are not interested in using the means to get the water. They are not ready to follow the spiritual and moral values of life, which are necessary to make the rain of spiritual water fall down. Therefore, it is ironical since their desire and means do not match. The values of life are generosity, compassion, and self-control. These values bring Peace, which brings all round prosperity and happiness. Without perpetual Peace and eternal happiness, it is impossible to attain liberation. Towards the end of the poem, Eliot collects the disembodied fragments of the past to remove sufferings: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" ("What the Thunder Said," p. 51). This suggests that he remembers the forgotten or lost spiritual and moral values of life. Here, moral values imply not only moral conventions but also conscious decisions taken with right knowledge and conscience.

Until and unless the modern people of the wasteland are eager to follow the ancient spiritual values, the situation seems to be pessimistic. They cannot undergo metamorphosis without the revival of those values that are found in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. Now they have the knowledge of science but not of spirituality. In reality, the knowledge of science is not a real knowledge in the sense that it cannot truly liberate human beings from universal bondage from the viewpoint of the Upanishads. The knowledge of the science is only information about the physical life and the materialistic world. The knowledge of Ātmā and Brahma is alone a real knowledge. Bellour argues that modern people have the wrong belief that rationality and "science could sweep away all human problems and misery and elevate the individual above the world" (2016, p. 425). This type of thinking is related to the *aparā vidyā* (lower knowledge related to the material life and the physical world), which is quite different from the *parā vidyā* (higher knowledge concerning Ātmā and Brahma) from the viewpoint of the Mundaka Upanishad (1:1:5).

The interest for spiritual quest is necessary to revive the dead life, to remember the forgotten Self, and to restore the lost eternal values stored in the unconscious. The wastelanders have desperate sadness; so they find even the spring season unsympathetic and uninteresting and cannot welcome the rain of the spring. The spring season seems to be dull because the mood of the wastelanders is dull: "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" ("The Burial of the Dead," p. 37). The cruellest month suggests the spiritual death of the modern people. The memory of the past, which could be both happy and sad, and the desire for the future, which could be a fantasy, indicate the intermixture of pain and pleasure, which come and go repeatedly like the cycle of winter and spring in the natural world.

The contradictory themes of human existence such as life and death, bondage and liberation are found in the five vignettes of *The Waste Land*. "The Burial of the Dead" refers to the burial of the vegetation gods, who are resurrected after their death. In simple words, they get new lives after death resulted from the loss of their physical and mental vigor. The death and resurrection suggests the universal and eternal cycle of life and death and the beginning and ending of worldly objects and phenomena. According to the Katha Upanishad, the processes of creation and destruction are eternal and natural just as the corn grows, gets old, decays, dies, and is born again out of its seed (1:1:6).

In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, there is a description of modern love affair, which is bewitching in the beginning but turns out to be disastrous, tragic, or sordid among "a heap of broken images" (p. 38). The love affair is just an infatuation. It offers neither fulfillment in love nor liberation from the bondage of life. Madame Sosostris warns the modern dwellers of *The Waste Land*, who have lost their spiritual contact with water, to fear death by water because she says, "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring [of birth and death]" (p. 39). She has witnessed the death of the drowned Phoenician Sailor, the doom of Belladonna, the wound of the man with three staves (the Fisher King), and the death of the foolish one-eyed merchant (pp. 38-39, 52).

On one hand, the wastelanders wish liberation but on the other hand they fear it because it demands a rigorous ordeal of enlightenment which is just opposite to hedonism. According to the Upanishads, liberation is impossible without spiritual knowledge and detachment/dispassion (*vairāgya*). It is not so easy to gain knowledge unless we are free from the illusion that all of us are separate and different from Brahma. However, it is very difficult to be free from the illusion, such as the illusion that we can get happiness through attachment, e.g. the sentimental attachment to the opposite sex. Due to this attachment or passion for pleasure, *The Waste Land* has become a sexual wasteland.

Sweet showers of rain are denied to the wastelanders even in Eliot's "A Game of Chess" (pp. 39-42). The poem presents the theme of the crisis of fidelity, marital sanctity, and sexual purity. The game of chess has sexual connotations. Here the game symbolically suggests sexual perversity, sexual intrigues, and the moves made in the seduction of women at night. The game of chess is found in Middleton's *Women beware Women* (Eliot, 1967, Notes on "The Waste Land," p. 51). The game is symbolic of the wicked play with sexual desires and emotions. Sexual perversity causes sterility. There (in "A Game of Chess") is a beautiful seducing description of the parlor of a lady, perhaps "Belladonna" as described by Eliot in "The Burial of the Dead" (p. 38), who has extra marital relationship, in a mock-heroic style. "The glass held up by standards wrought with fruited vines" ("A Game of Chess," p. 39) and "the glitter of her jewels" (p. 39) suggest artificiality. The atmosphere inside the room is suffocating and stupefying, suffused with "the fattening" of "the prolonged candle flames" (p. 40), which is deadening the fresh air blowing in from the window. Here the trivial triumphs the substantial.

Belladonna's perfume arouses neither libido nor orgasm. It rather worsens her nerves; so she complains, "My nerves are bad to-night" (p. 40). As her husband arrives at home, she and her spouse think of an escape from the insidious horror and desire for a closed car in case it rains. The irony here is that the lovers will escape from the suffused room only to the more confined space of a car in which they will be sheltered from the reinvigorating water of rain and think of the dull intercourse (a game of chess). Here their emotional disturbance is primarily caused by their failure to take the advantage of water, the source of "health," "strength," "happiness," and "great delight" (Pannikar, 1997, p. 19). The problem of rape is an age-old one. In the myths of the past, such as in the myth of "Philomela" ("A Game of Chess," p. 40), Philomela changes herself into a swallow after being raped and subsequently pursued by the cruel Tereus (*Oxford Dictionary*). Rape has become a major problem of the modern society. We can solve this problem of rape by following the lessons of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad.

In "The Fire Sermon," Eliot shows that modern people do not really want the purifying rain of spirituality. Its reason is that spirituality deprives people of wantonness, sexual promiscuity, and perversity. As a result, the world is on the fire of sterile passion; the river of Thames is polluted; and "the canal" is "dull" (p. 43) due to the dirty activities performed by the lustful people and the waste material deposited by the industrialists. Only the person who can resist all lust and desire can achieve real Peace, happiness, and freedom, which is denied to the wastelanders. "The Fire Sermon" and "The Game of Chess" move around the themes of the inconsistent nature of human beings, obsessive desire, and the struggle of dealing with passion as people try to live their lives. Both poems suggest that desire is fire, which destroys physical, emotional, and spiritual lives. In this connection, citing the Dhammapada, Weeraperuma (2006) writes:

There is no fire akin to lust,  
There is no seizer akin to anger,  
There is no net akin to delusion,  
There is no river akin to craving. (p. 23)

According to the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad, the river represents the flow of life of human beings (1:5). Prashna and Mundaka Upanishads assert that all the rivers (individual selves, souls) finally flow into the ocean, i.e., the Universal Self or Brahma (6:5; 3:8). Therefore, the river or water represents individual selves' spiritual journey from the mundane world to the spiritual one of eternity (Timeless Brahma) or liberation.

"The Fire Sermon" suggests that in the past, the rivers of London were full and pure. Now, they are being contaminated and gradually drying out, and, as a result, turning every place into the wasteland. Therefore, "the nymphs are departed" (p. 42). This reminds us of Arnold's poem "The Dover Beach" (1851) which describes how the sea was once full and now how it is receding by turning its beaches into desert. Now, the river of Thames has been an entertaining place for brief liaisons. It has become a popular rendezvous for love makers. Now, it is made dirty with orgies of lust by the holidaying crowd of merrymakers. The river bears "empty bottles, sandwich papers, / silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights" (p. 42). "White bodies naked on the low damp ground" (p. 43) are seen here and there. This makes Tiresias unhappy and he finds himself deserted even by the modern nymphs. Lonely, he weeps and sings a sorrowful song by the bank of Leman.

Thames looks like the sexual commercial place of a brothel house. The river witnesses Elizabeth and Leicester's debased romances. Tiresias, despite being blind and yet gifted with spiritual enlightenment, observes the indifferent, unemotional, and sordid sexual intercourse between a typist girl and a clerk. She has lost her virginity due to her foolish sensual desire. Though being her regular lover, the clerk "assaults [rapes] her at once" ("The Fire Sermon," p. 44). She is not actually happy with her lover's sexual activities. So, she reflects ironically, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (p. 44). Mrs. Potter and her illegal sexual partner Mr. Sweeney are licentious. Mrs. Porter and her daughter "wash their feet in soda water" (p. 43) to attract sexual customers instead of washing feet as part of the holy ritual at the bank of Thames. Water is simply water for them, not a holy thing that could purify the soul. In this way, the shameful, gross, and illicit sexual activities of prostitution, adultery, fornication, or rape take place near the river: Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd (p. 43).

In England including London through which Thames flows, neither the married couples nor the unmarried lovers and beloveds can make pure love for each other. Sex is merely a routine, a dull activity. Even consensual love is not satisfactory. "Life is psychologically inert, spiritually dead and sexually defunct" (Pandey, 1992, p. 116). In such a crisis, Tiresias, the narrator, thinks of "asceticism" of both—St. Augustine's "Sermon on the Mount" and "Buddha's Fire Sermon" (Eliot, 1997, Notes on "The Waste Land," p. 53)—as a spiritual treatment for the worldly disease of lust. Asceticism inspires to avoid lust. Lust traps in bondage while austerity liberates from it. The internal renunciation of lust, anger, and avarice is better than the external renunciation of one's life style. The internal renunciation alone can bring a long lasting Peace and happiness. Eliot seems to have been disturbed by sexual obsessions more than usual in *The Waste Land*. So, he surrenders to the idea of asceticism and renunciation.

The ideas of both the Christian and Buddhist asceticism and renunciation are rooted in the Upanishads. With reference to the above discussion, the Katha Upanishad stresses on the necessity of observing austerity (*tapa*) and celibacy (*brahmacharya*), only by which Brahma can be attained (1:2:15). Similarly, the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad inspires us to observe self-control (*dama*) (5:2: 3) to obtain Peace and happiness. Austerity, self-control, knowledge of the Vedas, and adherence to truth are the special means to realize Brahma, who is the ultimate Reality and the Essence of the universe (Kena 4:8). The laborious practitioners who are free from all types of defect can attain Brahma by truth, austerity, right knowledge, and celibacy (Mundaka 3:1:5). In fact, it is difficult to attain liberation but once one attains it, he or she never comes back to this world after death. Liberation is like the black hole from which no object comes back once it goes into it. The Katha Upanishad declares that only they, not others, who always see the Self inside themselves, can achieve Peace (2:2:13). Eliot gives much importance to the attainment of Peace for the sake of liberation from all kinds of bondage and sufferings at the end of *The Waste Land*.

As suggested in "The Fire Sermon" above, they who are slaves to purely physical emotion such as lust can never meditate on Brahma or the still point, and, hence, they can never be liberated from the wheel of life and death. Actually, one should first be liberated from one's own mental defects such as pride, ego, greed, selfishness, self-centeredness, anger, arrogance, bitterness, hatred, violence (physical, psychological, and emotional), and one's blindness to the needs and hurts of others. This type of liberation is inward liberation. Not lustful but unconditional and unselfish love for all is a need of the hour, as suggested in "The Fire Sermon."

In "Death by Water," Eliot presents an ironical picture of modern human beings. In the past, people revered water, which was a symbol of reinvigoration, rejuvenation, and liberation. They were not afraid of dying by water, which was also a symbol of spirituality, austerity, and chastity. But now, they fear "death by water" (p. 46). According to the Hindu philosophy, those who die being in touch of the water of "Ganga" ("What the Thunder Said," p. 49) at the time of death achieve liberation. In "Death by Water," Phlebas drowns and dies by water "entering the whirlpool" (p. 46) but does not attain liberation because he had no faith in the purifying power of water, i.e., spirituality. He lived a material life until his death. "The whirlpool" is a symbol of the wheel of life and death and circularity of time. According to the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad, five sense objects (*pañchāvarṭām*) are the whirlpools and by being tied to them, a *jīva* (individual creature) moves on the wheel of life and death (1:5) unless he or she attains spiritual knowledge.

Therefore, Eliot makes us cautious of the wheel and the vanities of life: "O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you" ("Death by Water," p. 47). This reminds us of

Dryden's (1682) great mock-epic satire "Mac Flecknoe," which presents a grim reality of life: "All human things are subject to decay, / And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey" (stanza 1). To this effect, the Shvetāshvatara Upanishad describes the world as the wheel composed of different worldly qualities such as vice and virtue with ignorance in its (of the world) center, which trap human beings in the cycle of life and death (1.4). The Katha Upanishad (1:1.6, 1:1:26-28) confirms the vanities and briefness of life similar to those that are described above in the analysis of "Death by Water."

The theme of fear of death in "Death by Water" can be linked to Eliot's intense revelation of death accompanied by the sense of life's changeability and impermanence. Everything, without exception, is transient, evanescent, and inconstant as represented by the "shadow" in "The Burial of the Dead":

There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (p. 38)

This extract suggests that all of the conditioned existence is short-lived. Here the poet longs for a resolution to his fear of death. The rock stands for God in Christianity. The phrase "a handful of dust" stands for death. At first, the poet is afraid of death. After a musing on it, he comes to accept its inevitability in life. Concerning death, the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad expresses that shadow or external darkness is the representative of the god of death (2:1:12). Actually, shadow or darkness stands for the ignorance, which is indwelling our heart. In Christian and Hindu philosophies, life is likened to a pot of clay. As the pot is fragile, so is the life. It can break any time. It has no guarantee of reliability and durability. Clay is symbolic of death. Only death is true in the world. In this regard, the Chhāndogya Upanishad declares that clay alone is the truth—"mr̥itīkā iti eva satyam" (6:1:4). Here, the clay also represents Brahma, i.e., the Absolute Truth or the First Cause of the creation of the universe (Chhāndogya 6:1:4).

In line of the argument presented above, the shadow and the red rock (the rock is red due to bright sunlight) are the representatives of a *jīvātmā* (individual self, soul) and *Paramātmā* (the Supreme Self) respectively from the viewpoint of the Katha Upanishad, which expresses that shadow (*chhāyā*) and sunlight (*dhūpa*) reside in the intellect-like cave of the heart (1:3:1). A *jīvātmā*, like the shadow, is less lighted—knowing little, and Brahma, like the sunlight, is fully lighted—knowing everything. However, the little light of the shadow is a part of the sunlight itself. There is no existence of the shadow without the presence of the sunlight. The shadow comes into existence with the light of the sun. Similar to this analogy, the little knowledge of a *jīvātmā* is not different from the knowledge of *Paramātmā*. What a *jīvātmā* knows is the knowledge revealed to it by *Paramātmā*.

Eliot's "What the Thunder Said" means what the Creator (Prajāpati or Brahmā) spoke through the thunder to his three groups of disciples: men, gods, and demons. In *The Waste Land*, people are dead and dying because of the lack of water or the loss of human, moral, and spiritual virtues: "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying / With a little patience" (p. 47). The narrator of "What the Thunder Said" wants to solve the crisis of water (spirituality), and, hence, he reaches the chapel, a symbol of the final destination of life, even by facing extreme heat through the dry, sandy, and stony desert without water. Disappointingly, "There is the empty chapel" with "dry bones" (p. 49), but no water. At this disappointing situation, he hears "a flash of lightning . . . with a damp gust / Bringing rain" (p. 49). The sunken "Ganga" and "limp leaves" wait for rain while the black clouds gather "far distant, over Himavant [the Himalayan Mountains]" (p. 49). The jungle animals gather together and wait for rain in silence when the thunder (*stanayitnu*) speaks: "DA" ("Datta"), "DA" ("Dayadhvam") and "DA" ("Dāmyata") (pp. 48-49) meant for the human beings to be generous, kind, and self-controlled respectively.

This can be made much clearer by a mythological story of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. Accordingly, the Creator speaks the same word "Da" to the three groups of His sons—gods, men, and demons (Asuras), who were learning from Him as celibate disciples—at the end of His teaching. The gods understand that "DA" is meant for them to control themselves. The men understand that "DA" is meant for them to give charity or donation to others. Finally, the demons understand that "DA" is meant for them to sympathize others. The Creator agrees with their different understandings. Even now, the divine voice of the thunder repeats "DA, DA, and DA" to remind us to subdue our senses ("Dāmyata"), to be merciful ("Dayadhvam"), and to give charity ("Datta") to others. In this way, the three groups of disciples—gods, men, and demons—learn the triad lessons of self-control (*dama*), donation or giving (*dāna*), and compassion or kindness (*dayā*) from the Creator (Brihadāranyaka 5:2:1-3). These cardinal lessons given by the Creator are the means of spiritual progress to attain "Shāntih." In fact, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity—they all stress on the need of generosity/charity/donation, mercy/kindness/compassion/non-violence, and self-control/self-subduence/self-discipline.

Commenting on the essence of giving charity (*dāna*), Pāea asserts, "The ethical Hinduism of the Upanishads conceives life as a form of 'being,' not of 'having'. . . Human value is not a function of 'I am what I have' but of 'I am what I give' (2007, p. 109). Only by controlling one's excessive desires, one can achieve the "harmony between the intellectual and emotional sides" (Bellour, 2016, p. 433) to bring about "Shāntih". Therefore, Eliot concludes in "What the Thunder Said" that only by the practice of "Datta. Dayadhvam. Dāmyata," one can achieve "Shāntih shāntih shāntih" (p. 50). For Shāntih (Peace) is another name of Brahma or God (Īshāvasya, Shānti-Pāth; Māndukya 7). When one

restores his or her lost faith in Brahma/God and spiritual values, he or she restores "Shāntih." Sadly, there is the crisis of such a spiritual faith in *The Wasteland* that metaphorically means that every place of the world is the wasteland where people have lost their connection with (the Non-dual) Brahma or the Divine Cosmic Power that alone rules the universe.

Eliot wants the rain of "Shāntih" to fall down as benediction at the end of *The Waste Land*. In the religious ceremonies of Hindus, a priest offers divine blessings upon devotees by sprinkling holy water upon their heads with the Upanishadic holy *mantra*, *Om shāntih! shāntih!! shāntih!!!*, for their Peace, happiness, health, and prosperity. Thus, there is a close connection between water and Peace in the religious and spiritual ceremonies of Hindus. After exploring Eliot's *The Waste Land*, we find Tiresias (a pilgrim, also the narrator of the story) acting like the Seer or Witness of the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad in "What the Thunder Said." We find Buddha and St. Augustine in "The Fire Sermon" urging humanity unanimously to practice the eternal spiritual virtues of self-control (*dama*), renunciation (*tyāga*), and asceticism (*tapasyā*) for getting Peace, which brings happiness and liberation at the end. Buddha is world-famous for his contribution to Peace, patience, compassion, non-violence, and humanity.

Thus, this paper explores Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* from the perspective of the ten principal Upanishads of the Hindu philosophy. Life is on a spiritual or cosmic journey for achieving "Shāntih," happiness, and liberation since its existence on this earth. Generosity, kindness, and self-discipline are important virtues of life, which help us to go from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality as expressed in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad (5.2.1-3, 1.3.28). Eliot depicts the same truth in his poem *The Waste Land* through the symbol of "water" and the river "Ganga" flowing from "Himavant" (the abode of ancient sages).

## VI. CONCLUSION

Individual selves' spiritual journey from bondage to liberation, with an analogy to water, is found in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The modern people living in the highly materialistic world are spiritually dry and empty. That is, they have no faith in Brahma/God and spiritual values. As a result, they are suffering from fear, doubt, pain, restlessness, deception, and unfair sex. Also, they are struggling against pessimism/hopelessness and materiality. They need the spiritual water of "Shanti" to cope with their difficulties. At the end of the poem, the people wait hopefully for the rainfall of generosity, compassion, and self-control followed by Peace, which can really end physical, natural, and spiritual troubles. The rain can befall if they attempt to transcend their material life. They can get the water of "Shāntih" (Peace, Brahma) and end their suffering if they become generous, kind, and self-controlled with the practice of asceticism, renunciation, and dispassion as expressed in *The Waste Land* and the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. "Shanti" (the attainment of Brahma or the Universal Self) brings about the end of the universal bondage of the repeating cycle of life, death and rebirth. "Shanti" follows when one restores his or her faith in Brahma/God and spiritual values of life.

The modern people of the wasteland of the world know this kind of theoretical knowledge concerning spirituality but the theoretical knowledge is not really useful if it is not used practically in the daily life. Certainly, theoretical knowledge is important and practical knowledge is still more important than that. Still further interpretation of Eliot's poetry from the viewpoint of the principal Upanishads is necessary to widen the horizon of knowledge and to understand Eliot scholarship in the Upanishadic way. This could help to renew his spiritual philosophy by crossing the boundaries of the Western culture.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Arnold, M. (1851). Dover Beach. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43588/dover-beach> (accessed 12/3/2021).
- [2] Bellour, L. (2016). The religious crisis and the spiritual journey in T. S. Eliot's *the waste land*. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 7.4, 422- 38.
- [3] Bhatta, R. C. (2015). Upanishad mā ke chha? [What is in the Upanishad?]. Kathmandu: Dikura Publication.
- [4] Drabble, M. (ed.) (2008). The Oxford companion to English literature (First Indian edn.). Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Dryden, J. (1682). Mac Flecknoe. Poetry Foundation. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44181/mac-flecknoe> (accessed 10/3/2021).
- [6] Eliot, T. S. (1967). The complete poems and plays of T. S. Eliot. USA: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- [7] Hume, R. E. (2012). The thirteen principal Upanishads (Revised edn). Delhi: Vijay Goel.
- [8] Mackean, I. (2005). The essentials of literature in English: Post—1914. London: Hodder Arnold.
- [9] Oxford Dictionary (2020). Philomela. Oxford dictionary. <http://www.lexico.com/en/definition/philomela> (accessed 11/3/2021).
- [10] Pandey, B. (1992). Disjunctive irony in the waste land. *Indian Journal of American Studies* 22.2, 112-17.
- [11] Pannikar, R. (1997). The Vedic experience: Mantramanjari. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- [12] Pătea, V. (2007). T. S. Eliot's *the waste land* and the poetics of the mythical method. In V. Pătea & P. S. Derrick (eds.), *Modernism Revisited: Transgressing Boundaries and Strategies of Renewal in American Poetry*. New York: Rodopi, 91-110.
- [13] Radhakrishnan, S. (ed. & trans.) (2012). The principal Upanishads. NOIDA: HarperCollins.
- [14] Sri, P. S. (1985). T. S. Eliot: Vedanta and Buddhism. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia Press.
- [15] Weeraperuma S. (2006). The first and best Buddhist teachings: Sutta Nipāta Selections and Inspired Essays (First Indian edn.). Delhi: New Age Books.

**Damaru Chandra Bhatta**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of English at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. At present, he is teaching at Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, Kathmandu. His areas of research are the Upanishads, spirituality, and literature. He has published some research articles in his areas of interest. He can be contacted at [damarubhatta@gmail.com](mailto:damarubhatta@gmail.com).