



08

**T. S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*, VYASA'S MAHABHARATA AND THE VOICES OF  
*BHAGWAT GITA*: A CAMPARATIVE STUDY**

**Mr. Trishan Deb**

Department of English  
Holy Cross College, Agartala  
Tripura, India

\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:**

*T. S. Eliot's, one of the most prominent poets of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tiresias (a Greek Mythological Character), the protagonist of the poem, The Waste Land endeavours to describe how the modern world people or the waste landers are suffering; mentally physically as well as spiritually. Eliot writes on the different facets of human suffering and the dimensions of Salvation. The Mahabharata is written by Vyasa which also talks about the sufferings of the human beings and some extra ordinary characters. The Bhagwat Gita also focuses and talks about everything that people question about life. The present research article endeavours to discuss a comprehensive understanding on the comparison among these renowned pieces of literature.*

**Keywords:** *Suffering, the Mahabharata, the Bhagwat Gita, Character, Sexual Prevention, Spirituality, Salvation, God, etc.*

*The Waste Land* is a long narrative poem by T.S Eliot. This poem Consists of 440 lines .It is one of the most important poems of the twentieth country .It is also considered to be one of the central works of modern literature .This poem is divided into five sections. These five sections possess different dimension of human suffering and how they lack their own moral values and spiritual values in the modern world converting this world a barren land or a waste land.

The *Mahabharata* is an epic legendary narrative recited by Vyasa and written by lord Ganesha. This epic talks about the Kuru Dynesty, The Kauravas, The Pandavas ,their war at the battle of Kurukshetra and many different aspects and mythical character which. Are still pertinent to the modern world.

The *Bhagvad Gita* is a 700 - verse Hindu Scripture which is a part of the *Mahabharata*, book number 6, Chapter Number-23 to 40 named 'Bheehma Parva'. This book is a series of question and answer between Arjuna and lord Krishna .This book is also relevant to the modern world that it is accepted as a guideline to restore the modern world named *The Waste Land*. It has been endeavoured to compare these three books in the light of thematic relevance, character portrayals, mythical study in the said research paper.

For a comprehensive understanding of my research project I consulted the following books and research article. In Shashidhar Nilays's research article *T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land: A Critical Analysis*, he critically examines *The Waste Land* from different angles and points of view. T. S. Eliot conveys through the depiction of the conflicts in his poetry and drama.

In Anthony Cuda's research article, the poems reception in the twentieth century and beyond he represents how the waste landers live and what are the consequences on the society for the waste land. In Jasantbhai Sureshbhai Majirana's research article *An Analytical Study of the Mahabharata as an Epic*, he explains that it is world's largest epic book which is believed to be seven times more than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. All the events of this epic have some unique significance and many characters having supernatural Powers.



In Harikumar Pallathadka and Laxmi Pallathadka's research article published in 2020, they have described how Barak Obama explains The Mahabharata's influence on him and the Indianness of the *Mahabharata*. In Dr. Muralikrishna's research article (2019) he talks about the scientific way of Bhagvad Gita. He talks about synthesis of living of the universe, end of the universe etc. After going through all the research article and books for a comprehensive understanding of my project, it was been found that the topic of my research project has not been dealt in any of the above sources.

This said research article is going to deal with a comparative approach in light of various narrative strategies. The narrative Strategies include thematic relevance, Character portrayals and mythical study among *The Waste Land*, *the Mahabharata* and the *Bhagvad Gita*. This research paper is going to deal with an in depth analysis on the similarities on these seminal books and their relevance in the modern world.

There are many myths and legends that have been discussed in the poem *The Waste Land* by T.S Eliot. One of the mythical characters is the fisher king. "While I was fishing in the dull canal on a winter evening round behind the gashouse. Musing upon the king my brothers wreck and on the king my father's death before him (Weston, 189-192). Eliot has mentioned Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Miss Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, especially the letter as the source of mythical framework in the poem. *The Waste Land* created by fisher king's wound serves as the central image of the poem and the king himself appears several times.

I sat upon the shore fishing with the arid plain behind me, shall I at least set my hands in order? The Fisher king is crippled by a magical wound and spends his day fishing on a lake near his castle. His lands are desolate, infertile as a result of his wound the knight Percival eventually came to the castle of the fisher king in search of the Holy Grail. Percival heals the king, restoring the land. To fertility, becoming the keeper of the grail (Weston).

The little of the first section *The Burial of the Dead* also has a significant mythological meaning. It has been taken from *Anglian Burial Service*. The poem thus opens with the idea that the land is wasted and dead.

Eliot has widened the scope of the poem by combining with it the classical waste land of king Oedipus and the barren land of Christian Bible. The classical association is symbolized by Tiresias, the blind prophet of Thebes, who is introduced as protagonist of the poem.

He stands for the human consciousness, connecting the present with the past and his vision which is the substance of the poem, is a series of flashes (Al Mahdi). Lamentation of Tiresias in the third part is having certain kind morality when he sees what clerk and typist are doing. Tiresias in the whole poem only gave passive advice. He is not actively present in the text as a person. This follows the anti-hero idea, which is also the main characteristic of the modern age.

Through this method Eliot makes us think not only the pastness of the past but also of its presence. The spiritual barrenness or death is at once temporal and timeless and the scene is London or any capital in Europe or in any place, anywhere, in any period of history.

Another character in the epigraph is sibyl The Cumaean Sibyl's quote "I want to die" is taken from Satyricon or Petronius. The background story of sibyl is founded in metamorphosis" she, being loved by Apollo granted to live as many years as grains of a help of of a dist: but she did not, and through she lived for centuries her, her body decayed in such way that eventually was as small as to kept in a Jar (Alejandro).

Sibyl wanted to escape from the world, wanted to liberate, wanted to attain 'Moksha' but she was not able to get out.

There are still many myths such as Madam, Hyacinth girl, Holy grail, Greek Gods (Cupid, Bacchus), Philomela, Thames daughter etc. which remain significant in the poem. The *Mahabharata*



recited by Vyasa and written by Lord Ganesha also comprises with many philosophical, devotional and mythological stories which are still pertinent to the modern world.

The most important evil character in *the Mahabharata* is Shakuni. He is always busy in playing constant tricks over another the greedy nature of his influenced the kauravas to be negative and it became a reason for their own destruction .There are many Shakuni-like Character that can be seen in the society.

दुर्जनेषु च सर्पेषु वरं सर्पो न दुर्जनः।  
सर्पो दंशति कालेन दुर्जनस्तु पदे-पदे ॥

This above Shloka by Acharya Chanakya Pandit goes with the character of Shakuni. It means if you compare between a bad person with a snake, still that snake would be better because that snake will bite you only once and that bad person or company will bite you again and again which Shakuni did, gave bad advises to the Kauravas and eventually made a big reason for the battle of Kurukshetra where Kauravas lost everything.

Another mythical character in the *Mahabharata* can be Karna. The story of Karna also possesses many mythical and philosophical aspects that are still relevant to the modern world. Bad company can rain your life beyond Imagination (Nijhawan). The nobleness of Karna also got amalgamated because he was in bad Company of Duryodhana, Shakuni and Dusshasana. He fought against Dharma for his friend Duryodhana. In his life he put Karna in Superior Position than Dharma. This story is still relevant as we behave the same when we are driven by bad people.

A very important mythical female character from the *Mahabharata* is Gandhari a princess from the land Gandhar who letter married to the blind king Dhritarastra. After marrying to Dhritarashtra she took a vow of remaining blindfolded for the rest of her life. She gave birth to 101 kids. Gandhari having too many kids that leads to the downfall of the Kauravas. It signifies that quality is better than quantity.

The *Mahabharata* is a long narrative epic with almost one lakh couplets. As the size of this epic is very gigantic there are many mythical characters and stories are related to it. Like the Kauravas, the Pandavas, Lord Krishna, Bheeshma, Drona etc. *The Waste Land*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagvad Gita* Share many themes which are very common and relevant to the modern world.

One of the common issues that have been discussed in these three seminal books is Sexual Perversion. There is one strong in *The Waste Land*, where three girls of Mrs. Porter, washing their feet with soda wasters, just to attract male. Another story of clerk and typist who are engaged in sexual activity also signifies sexual perversion. Similarly in Mahabharata we see numerous examples of Sexual Perversion and Lack of Spirituality. The Character of Duryodhana is a Sexually perverted character, he wanted to see Draupadi naked. He also wanted to forcefully indulge in a Sexual activity with a Gandharva Princess. This signifies that these characters were too much obsessed with Sexual Intercourse hence they are Sexually Perverted . In *the Bhagvad Gita* also Lord Krishna explains how people are too much involved in sexual activity hence he said.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु |  
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥

It means when you regulate your obsession for food, Sleep, Work, Sexual desires and activities you will be free from the entire problem in your life. Thus Sexual perversion is discussed in these three seminal books.



Spiritual death is also a topic which is very common in. *The Waste Land*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagvad Gita*. In *the Waste Land*, one can see how the people of the modern world or the waste landers have lost all of their ethical, moral and spiritual value system They Lost their belief from the Christian church and Jesus Christ which is a result.

The modern life or the waste Sanders suffers with frustration desolation and perversity. In *Mahabharata*, one can see a story when Sri Krishna goes to Hastinapur to Convince the King Dhritarashtra to Grant five Villages to the Pandavas. But Duryodhana refused and took the audacity to tie lord Krishna himself. Even after knowing that Krishna is god he wanted to make Krishna a prisoner which shows the spiritual death in Duryodhana. Lord Krishna in the *Bhagvad Gita*. Understands the situation of Arjuna that he is tacking belied in him and in Krishna also as the lord says.

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।  
अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः  
॥ 66॥

It means “abandon all the varieties of dharmas and simply surrender unto me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful. Reactions; do not fear. This was said by lord Krishna so that he can restore spiritual values in Arjuna and by him to the readers of *Bhagvad Gita*. There are different challenges that we face in our life. All the three seminal books talks about different aspects of challenge that is faced in our life. T. S. Eliot mentions in *The Waste Land* that the modern people or the waste landers face many challenges, which take all the charm from their life, and make them frustrated.

In *A Game of Chess* the lady of situations is bored with her life and has become extremely narcotic. Her lover too suffers from mental exhaustion. He says, “I think we are rat’s alley where the dead man lost their bones.”

In the *Mahabharata* also one can see character like Arjuna in the battlefield saying ‘Romaharshajayate’ that means he is getting Goosebumps by seeing his relatives as his opponents. It can also be seen that characters like Bheeshma and Dronacharya who supports pandavas by heart but they had to fight against them which was a big challenges for them.

T. S. Eliot chows his deep sadness for the waste land and for the waste lendors .As there is no hope for life in the waste land Eliot is still hopeful as he described in the last part of *What the Thunder Said*- that the land is barren, wasted and dead. There is no hope for life, everyone prayed to the god for their salvation and with a thunder storm god replied, “Datta, Dayadhvam, Damayat” it means if men in the waste land practice ‘to give’ ‘to sympathise’ and ‘to control’ by his own –self there will be the re-birth of life, spiritual values and peace again. As the bard says, “Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.” Similatly in *Bhagvad Gita* Krishna Says in Chapter-4, Verse-7 to 8 that whenever people will start worshipping the evil and when this world will become a waste or dead land, I will come and I will be the reason for your salvation.

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य  
यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य  
ग्लानीं भवति भरत  
अभ्युत्थानम् अधर्मस्य



तदात्मनम् श्रीजाम्यहम्  
परित्राणाय सौधुनाम्  
विनशाय च दुष्कृताम्  
धर्मसंस्था पन्नार्थाय  
संभवामि युगे युगे

This means even in the worst of the times god either given us the direction or he himself appear to restore the waste land .This is why Eliot was hopeful for the restoration of the waste land. T.S. Eliot has used many allusions and imageries in *The Waste Land*. Those allusions include many characters from Greek and other world mythologies. We can see many similarities in terms of Character portrayal in *The Waste Land* and the *Mahabharata*.

One if the character in *The Waste Land* is Tiresias. He was granted the special power of prophecy from his Childhood. Later in his life he got a curse from goddess Hera who made him women from a man. Tiresias is one of the protagonists of the poem who got a taste of both the genders. In the *Mahabharata* we get a similar character named Brihannala. Birhannala was actually the Mighty Arjuna who was cursed by angel Urvashi in heaven, when he refused to marry her. He was made a sterile man for one year .He took the disguise and became Brihannala (a transgender). Birhannala was also a character who got the taste of more than one gender.

In the epigraph of *The Waste Land*: one can get a character called sibyl. Sibyl was very much loved by Apollo as he granted her with immortality. But she forgot to ask for eternal youth .As her body withered away till only her voice was left and she was eventually kept in a jar. Sibyl is a character that portrays the waste landers are fearful of life and haunted by death. In the *Mahabharata* one can see a similar character like Vheeshma. Bheeshma was granted death by his wish (Icchamrityu) by.

His father Shantunu, through he lived for centuries and with great power and heroism, he still suffered for the sake of Hastinapur protection. He was a supporter of the Pandavas but he had to fight for the Kauravas. As for his vow he could not die till Hastinapur gets protected he spent fifty one nights in the arrow bed and suffered immensely as he saw man deaths of his loved ones till he died.

There are several other characters which are similar in *The Waste Land* and in the *Mahabharata* like Tiresias and Dhritarashtra; Thunder god and lord Krishna etc. *The Waste Land*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagvad Gita* are very much known for their gigantic size.

Every book is very much relevant to and to compare with each other .Out of there enormous themes this project found out a comparative approach in light of different narrative strategies in terms of theme, character portrayal and mythical study. Every seminal book possesses pertinence in the modern life and gives real life lessons to the modern world.

#### References

- AI-Mahdi, Dr. Iman Abdulah Yahya, *Myth and Archetype: Their Application in the Waste Land*. AI-Nasser University. Print.
- Chumber, Sonia. *The Voices of the Bhagvad Gita and Upanishad in T. S. Eliot's The waste Land*. International Journal of Language and Literature, American Research Institute for policy development, 2014. Print.



- Cuda, Anthony. *The Waste Land's Afterlife; The Poems Reception in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*. The Cambridge Companion to the Waste Land, Edited by Gobielle McIntire, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.
- N.V.R. Krishnamacharya.
- The Mahabharata, Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1983. Print.  
Pallathadka, H, and Pallathadka, L. "India Through Mahabharata: A Critical View. European Journal of Molecular and Clinical Medicine Volume-07, 2020
- Prabhupada, Srila. *Bhagvad Gita As it Is*, Macmillan Publishers, 1968. Print.
- Tilak, Raghukul. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. Rama Brothers, 2001. Print.
- Weston, Jessie, L. *The Waste Land and the Fisherking*. Ritual to Romance, 1920. Print.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

**To Cite the Article: Deb, Trishan, "T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Vyasa's Mahabharata and the Voices of Bhagwat Gita: A Comparative Study". Literary Cognizance, III-2 (September, 2022): 40-45. Web.**