

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Renunciation, Inner Peace amid Desolation: The Road to Emancipation  
Insights from *The Mahābhārata* and *The Waste Land***

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**Abstract:**

Desolation and despair prevail in modern society and in this increasingly fragmented world the individuals are facing emotional and spiritual challenges. The Mahābhārata, an ancient epic, provides deep insights into the concepts of inner peace and detachment through the teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. These teachings emphasise the importance of self-awareness, moral choices, and detachment from the outcomes of one's actions. In contrast, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* offers a 20th-century perspective on the disconnection and despair that can be found in modern society. Thus, drawing inspiration from two diverse yet equally influential literary works, this research paper seeks to elucidate the universal nature of the human quest for inner peace and detachment and emancipation. It also suggests that the timeless wisdom and the insights from these two great literary works continue to be relevant in guiding individuals towards a more fulfilling and harmonious life.

**Keywords:** Detachment, Inner Peace, Emancipation

“The war of Kurukshetra evaporated in the final chapter. The Mahābhārata did not stop where it should for the story lover; it moved on having demolished the great story in a moment's peace, like a playhouse made of sand. Those who have a detachment to the world and the story got their truth through this and did not grumble.”

*Rabindranath Tagore (qtd. in Chakravarti)*

The ultimate goal of humanity is to attain eternal Supreme Bliss. It is only one's 'Self' (ātman) that can experience this happiness. This eternal bliss can be attained through spirituality (Sruthi et al. 26), and religion emerges as the fructifying power that can restore fertility to the spiritual aridity of modern civilization (Bellour 422). In Hinduism, renunciation is the true mark of spiritual life. However, it is not that easy to understand and follow renunciation. For much of what we do, we do with ends in mind. We act in specific ways in order to achieve a particular end, which makes our current action a means to achieving that end (Rossbach 11). However, a person fully embracing renunciation does not have specific ends in mind. True renunciation is a state of mind and a way of life in which one sets aside one's desires, expectations, deliberate efforts, and compulsive planning.

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He identifies with his spiritual nature and recognizes his connection with the universal self. He allows his life to unfold naturally according to the Divine Will, without fear or anxiety, willingly surrendering to the Almighty. Through renunciation, he becomes genuinely free from the urge to direct his life or the habitual compulsion to exert his will to ensure his survival and success. Eventually, he transcends the state of doing, entering a state of pure being.

Srimad Bhagavad Gitā, the most profound Hindu religious text, declares renunciation as the highest form of spiritual discipline in the words, “he who has brought his senses, mind, and intellect under control,- such a contemplative soul intent on liberation and free from desire, fear and anger, is ever liberated”(Ch.5,verse 27, 28). The spirit of renunciation is exemplified in the life and actions of Lord Krishna himself. Despite outwardly leading a luxurious life and seeming to relish the luxuries of royal existence, he maintains an inner detachment. He stands for righteousness and fulfills his duties by destroying demons and individuals with evil intentions. While doing so, he is driven by a sense of duty rather than any desire for revenge. In the epic The Mahābhārata, while the various characters display intense emotions and turmoil, Lord Krishna remains calm and composed throughout.

The two prominent literary works under consideration in this paper, The Mahābhārata by Maharshi Ved Vyāsa and The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot illustrate the feelings of desolation and disorder. The narrative of the great epic The Mahābhārata threads together great legends, incorporating elements of mythology, philosophy, and spiritual wisdom. The innermost seed of this epic tells the story of two sets of paternal first cousins—the five sons of deceased Pāndu, the Pāndavas, and one hundred sons of blind king Dhritarāshtra, the Kauravas. They become bitter rivals and oppose each other in a war for possessing the ancestral Bhārat kingdom with its capital Hastināpur on the Gangā river in north-central India. The central conflict of this epic begins when the rightful successor to the throne, the visually impaired prince Dhritarāshtra, is passed over in favor of his younger sibling, Pāndu. However, Pāndu chooses to leave the throne and retreat to the Himalayan mountains to lead a hermit's life. As a result, Dhritarāshtra ultimately assumes the throne. Pāndu's five sons reside at the royal court with their cousins.

When the time comes, Yudhishthira, the eldest Pāndava, asserts his right to the throne, which leads to a bitter dispute in the family. This familial conflict escalates when the Kauravas eventually compel the Pāndavas into exile for thirteen years. Upon Pāndavas' return to the court, Dhritrāshtra allocates portions of the kingdom to his sons and the Pāndavas. Discontented with this distribution, the Kauravas initiate a deceitful game of dice, through which they cunningly reclaim the entire kingdom. Once again, the Pāndavas were banished from their rightful domain, which led to the civil war known as the Great War of Kurukshetra. While giving a live commentary of the battlefield to Dhritarāshtra, Sanjaya, his charioteer and advisor, says to him, "Then O Bharata, in consequence of thy sinful policy, commenced a dreadful battle” (Mahābhārata 842).

Similarly, the major poetry of T.S. Eliot concerns the deteriorating modern conditions due to a lack of religiosity and true love in man for man. Love is the most outstanding value that humanity

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has come up with; it expresses who we are, in essence, who we are at our very best (Molisa 453), yet modern humans do not retain it. Through his works, Eliot suggests, as in the Upanishads, that the ultimate goal of life is to attain perpetual peace and unbound joy (Bhatta 25). Eliot regrets human failure to maintain the ancient belief in the value orientation beyond the self, which has turned us all into lonely creatures lost in the self-gratifying pursuits of wealth and physical pleasure. The whole world is seen as becoming a wasteland, and our individual lives also have become waste. The poem *The Waste Land* raises eternal questions about the clash between evil and good, between disbelief and belief, and thus, it has a universal appeal. It focuses our attention on the different facets of life without belief and severance of man from the Divine. There is no moral authority beyond him to curb his wayward instinctive urges; no objective value exists in the wasteland of his anarchic self-seeking pursuits. Every human being moves like an automaton with a parched spirit and deadened soul. The poem offers a 20th-century perspective on the disconnection and despair that can be found in modern society and serves as a reflection of the emotional and spiritual challenges faced by individuals in an increasingly fragmented world.

The theme of the poem encompasses simultaneously several levels of experience arising out of various wastelands: the wasteland of religion in which there is “no water but only rock/ Rock and no water and the sandy road” (*The Waste Land*, lines 331-332) and the wasteland of the spirit from which all moral and spiritual springs have evaporated. Life is like a dead alley leading nowhere, and it is full of dead things, “I think we are in rat's alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones” (Lines 115-116). Eliot suggests that even death in the desolate land of today does not lead to regeneration. Life has become a meaningless routine, “hot water at ten/And if it rains, a closed car at four (Lines 135-136). Thus, the poem depicts the futility, frustration, misery, and physical and spiritual barrenness of the twentieth-century civilization, “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish? (Lines 19-20)

With this theme of desolation and barrenness, the two works highlight the profound quest for Emancipation. In *The Mahābhārata*, the five sons of Pāndu are fathered by five gods, and these heroes are assisted throughout the story by various gods, seers, and brāhmins. The Kauravas, on the other hand, have a grotesque, demonic birth and are said to be the human incarnations of the demons who are the perpetual enemies of the gods. The most dramatic figure of the entire epic is Krishna Vāsudeva, the Supreme God Vishnu himself, who descends to earth in human form to rescue law, good deeds, right, and virtue. He is the cousin of both parties but is a friend and advisor to the Pāndavas and serves as Arjuna's mentor and charioteer in the Great War. Hence, Bhishma, the grandfather, indirectly tries to warn Duryodhana of the fatal consequences of the war and advises him not to fight, “Krishna beareth great love for the illustrious sons of Pāndu. It is for this, O king of kings, that I say, let peace be made with the Pāndavas (*Mahābhārata* 854).

The Pāndavas win the eighteen-day battle, but the victory deeply troubles all. Gāndhāri, who loses all her sons, curses Krishna to be a witness to a similar annihilation of his family, for though divine and capable of stopping the war, he has not done so. Krishna accepts the curse, which bears

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fruit thirty-six years later, when, after a vigorous and heroic life, he retires to the forest to meditate. There, a hunter mistaking him for a deer fatally wounds him. Pāndavas, grief-stricken on hearing this news, decide to renounce everything and, clad in skin and rags, retire to the Himālayas. After a long, tiring, and arduous journey, they can reach Heaven and enjoy Supreme Bliss. In this way, the great epic concludes with a note of despair and communicates that final Emancipation is the most prominent of human values. Detachment from mundane pursuits and pleasures evokes inner tranquillity in the mind, leading to Supreme bliss.

Likewise, the characters in *The Waste Land* are discontented with the attraction of materialism and the shallowness of the world. Beneath their everyday lives, a more profound desire

For inner peace and freedom emerges as a driving force. This dissatisfaction underlines the characters' search for a more meaningful existence, one characterized by a profound sense of peace and liberation from the confines of a purely worldly existence. The poem is not merely a cry in the wilderness over something past and gone; “despite the sense of loss and meaninglessness of existence, *The Waste Land* traces the journey of the self from ignorance and suffering, through the night of the soul to a vantage point from where it can see into the heart of light”(Patea 1). The poem also emphasizes the importance of restoring a “system of belief” that may be known but has been misdirected. Eliot feels that the one and the last possibility of a solution to contemporary problems is to follow the rule of the Prajāpati. At the conclusion of their education as students in search of sacred knowledge, the three-fold offsprings of Prajāpati—gods, men, and demons—ask him to be instructed. In reply to the questions raised by them, Prajāpati gives three commands “Da” “Da” and “Da” which ultimately signify the sacred knowledge. The first “Da” refers to “datta” (*The Waste Land*, line 407) which suggests a surrender. The Upanishad instructs them that their worth is in submitting themselves to the will of God rather than exercising their will over everything. Once they have submitted themselves to the will of God, the entities of awe, tension, fear, and frustration would simply pass away as common features of change and happening.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a name for a tense living. Yet, it is “tinged with the transcendent and the divine, as his ecologism is deeply ethical and spiritual” (Serrano 133), which could but be relieved of with a confident submission. If the first command is meant as giving oneself away to a higher value, the second command asks an individual to be merciful since compassion is the true hallmark of a spiritual life. Ego is the first evil, which the Waste Landers have to annihilate by philosophical restraint. Pride, the originator of ego, has to be kept off the human self. The self is locked in the prison of pride, and the human ego cannot be annihilated unless it has been released of its barriers. The only key unlocking the doors of the prison, in which ‘self’ has been kept, is sympathy, “Dayadhvam: I have heard the key/ Turn in the door once and once only (*The Waste Land*, lines 411-412). The third “da” is “damyata” (line 418) which means self-control. The command propagates a simple idea that the freedom of action without moral or religious control would lead to destruction, waste, and death. On the contrary, freedom, tempered by moral and philosophical restraint, leads to fruitful ends and enduring pleasures.

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Eliot concludes his poem with the well-known formal ending of the great Upanishads, the repetition of the Sanskrit word 'Shantih.' It signifies absolute peace, the peace that transcends understanding and fragmented life. The words are not used mechanically; instead, Eliot wishes for universal peace. By closing his poem with this invocation, he suggests that by adhering to the triple commands of Prajāpati man can rehabilitate his lost glory leading to salvation and rejuvenation in the wasteland ultimately bringing in peace everywhere. The reader, one of the 20th-century men, recognizes the falling condition of modern civilization. However, he identifies with the characters and becomes a part of this world.

Consequently, he feels hatred for all these worldly matters, which results in his detachment from mundane pursuits and pleasures. This feeling evokes inner tranquillity in his mind, and he relishes peace. The sense of renunciation, in its turn, brings final.

Emancipation. In this way, "Liberation," as Jason Gregory opines, "rests upon the total understanding of consciousness and the reality we experience"(7). The great ancient Indian Epic, The Mahābhārata, communicates the same fact, and the truth that underlies this incredible story is detachment leading to liberation.

To conclude, the modern global stage is degraded by conflict, both among individuals and nations. Regrettably, violence, a pervasive sense of enmity, and the thirst for vengeance pervade many corners of our planet. The most recent Russia Ukraine War, and Palestine Israel War are unfortunate and tragic examples of struggle for power and resources, political disputes, and cultural differences leading to a pervasive atmosphere of tension and mistrust. Within societies, personal grievances and societal divisions fuel hostility and violence. In such a climate, the need of the hour is a feeling of renunciation and peace. The challenges of our time call for efforts to bridge divides and cultivate a more harmonious, peaceful coexistence in a world where unity and cooperation are essential for the well-being of all.

*Shantih shantih shantih (The Waste Land , line 433)*

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