

## THE STILL POINT AND THE ETERNAL DHARMA: TRACING INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE WORKS OF T.S. ELIOT AND SRI MADHAVA ASHISH

**Dr. Suchitra Awasthi,**

Associate Professor,  
Department of English and Foreign Languages, Uttarakhand Open University,  
Haldwani, Nainital, India.

### ABSTRACT

*Sri Madhava Ashish (1920–1997), a British-born seeker who dedicated his life to Indian spirituality, and T.S. Eliot (1888–1965), a literary giant deeply influenced by Indian philosophy, converge on themes of unity, renewal, and interconnectedness. Sri Madhava Ashish's "soil-to-soul" philosophy involved leading a simple life in which experience was viewed as an opportunity to grow. In this Youtube video Sri Madhava Ashish at Mirtola, Ashish talks about first-hand and second-hand experiences and the need to be willing to experience and explore for oneself things that others testify to. According to Eliot "Old men should be explorers (East Coker, Four Quartets). Everyone should be an explorer, says Ashish. Ashish's spiritual practices were rooted in ecological practices and vice versa as he advocated learning lessons on spirituality through farming. This mirrors the spiritual renewal sought in Eliot's poetry, particularly The Waste Land and Four Quartets. T.S. Eliot also had a deep (pun-intended) interest in agriculture and Organicism. Both Eliot and Ashish articulate a vision of harmony between human actions and the natural world, drawing inspiration from Indian texts like the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads.*

*This paper, based on texts such as What is Man? and An Open Window by Sri Madhava Ashish and Eliot's canonical works, examines the philosophical and spiritual intertextuality between Sri Madhava Ashish and T.S. Eliot. Their legacies underscore the enduring relevance of Indian philosophy in addressing modern spiritual, ecological and existential crises.*

### INTRODUCTION

Eliot's and Ashish's traumatic experiences of WWII (also WWI in Eliot's case) were formative in their outlooks and move away from society as they had lived it thus far. Ashish was an engineer who studied at a Polytechnic in Chelsea. He was sent to India during the Second World War to repair Spitfire engines. T.S. Eliot experienced the devastating air raids in London, working as a Volunteer Fire Warden. This experience obviously underpinned the "Familiar Compound Ghost" section of "Little Gidding", "Four Quartets":

*" In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent end of the unending  
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed below the horizon of his homing  
While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin  
Over the asphalt where no other sound was  
Between three districts whence the smoke arose  
I met one walking, loitering and hurried  
As if blown towards me like the metal leaves  
Before the urban dawn wind unresisting."*

Eliot Little Gidding p.33

This whole section of "Little Gidding" demonstrates Eliot's alchemical transformation of Actuality into Unimaginable Art.

Ashish was inspired by Gurdjieff and Madame Blavatsky as well as by Indian philosophy expressed in texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. His teachings were therefore a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies.

Sri Madhava Ashish and T.S. Eliot, though separated by their fields of work and periods, shared an overlapping period of adult intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, exhibiting a profound intellectual kinship in the way they formulated the way to live in the times and societies they found themselves in. Ashish, born Alexander Phipps in Edinburgh, felt disillusioned by the materialistic and fragmented nature of Western modernity. (He was 2 years old when Eliot's modernist masterpiece *The Waste Land* was published in 1922. So, he may not have read it until later on in life.) After working in India maintaining Spitfire aircraft, Phipps went on pilgrimage in India in the 1940s, where he sought spiritual transformation under Yashoda Ma (Monica Chakravati) and Sri Krishna Prem (born Ronald Nixon) at the Mirtola Ashram in Almora, Uttarakhand. T.S. Eliot, born in St. Louis, Missouri, studied Indian philosophy during his early studies at Harvard. Both men were drawn to the profound wisdom embedded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and other spiritual texts, integrating these insights into their respective endeavors. In fact in a letter dated 6 March 1952 to M. S. S. Iyengar, Eliot elaborated:

"I only took up the study of Indian philosophy seriously during the period 1911–14, when at Harvard University. I worked on the elements of Sanskrit and Pali for two years with Professor C. R. Lanman, and on Sankhya philosophy with Professor J. H. Woods. Since that period, I have never had the leisure to pursue these studies seriously, and have, indeed, lost all my slight proficiency in the languages. It was during this period that I read with Professor Lanman, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, some selected *Upanishads* in Sanskrit, as well as some of the *Nikayas* in Pali. I also

read the *Sankhya-Bhasya-Karika* and commentary in Palanjali with Professor Woods."

He also considered becoming a Buddhist before eventually becoming a High Anglican. This was overheard by Stephen Spender as Eliot talked to Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral of the period when he was writing *The Waste Land*.

T.S. Eliot's concept of the still point in *Four Quartets* resonates deeply with the philosophical underpinnings of Indian thought, where the search for an immutable center forms the foundation of spiritual inquiry. In *Burnt Norton*, Eliot writes:

"At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh  
nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the  
dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it  
fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither  
movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the  
still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the  
dance."

Eliot *Burnt Norton* p.5

Eliot's still point represents a transcendent space, an axis mundus where time and movement dissolve into a state of profound equilibrium. It is neither progress nor stasis, neither flux nor rigidity—it is the paradoxical core around which all experience moves. This idea aligns with the Vedantic and Buddhist notions of an ultimate reality beyond the fluctuations of samsara, where wisdom is not in movement but in recognition of the eternal.

Sri Madhava Ashish, in his selected writings, echoes a similar concern with clarity of thought and discernment in the search for Truth. He warns against spiritual wandering without direction, stating:

"If we do not take the trouble of clarifying our ideas at the beginning, and to keep clarifying as we go along, then we shall wander aimlessly among the

cheap-junk vendors of ersatz wares, until we find ourselves back at our starting point richer in experience, it is true, but older, sadder, though not necessarily wiser." (*What is Man*, p. 37)

Ashish critiques the modern tendency to mistake experience for wisdom, just as Eliot warns against the illusion of progress without true understanding. For both, the challenge is to arrive at a place of clear seeing—a still point where the mind is free from distractions, misconceptions, and the superficial trappings of spirituality.

Eliot's still point is not merely a passive state but the very condition that makes movement, transformation, and the dance of existence possible. Similarly, Sri Madhava Ashish calls for a journey of continual refinement, where wisdom is not accumulation but clarification. His perspective aligns with the Advaita Vedantic approach, which sees the Self as always present, merely obscured by ignorance. The spiritual task, then, is to remove the veils that distort perception, much like Eliot's struggle to transcend the fragmentation of modern existence.

Both thinkers suggest that wisdom is not found in restless seeking but in discerning—in standing at the still point where action and contemplation, Time and Eternity, are reconciled. Their shared vision offers a critique of an unexamined spiritual journey and affirms the need for a philosophy rooted in clarity, patience, and the pursuit of the eternal Dharma.

Both T.S. Eliot and Sri Madhava Ashish emphasize that true wisdom is not derived from external sources but must emerge from direct, first-hand experience. Ashish, in *What is Man*, asserts:

*"We are both scientist and laboratory. For we must search in the one place where we have first-hand knowledge of anything at all, and this is in the root of our own consciousness. We ourselves must know and be the result of our searching. Anyone else's experience is, for us, second-hand—a collection of words and images which have meaning for us only in so far as we can relate them to our own experience."* (*What is Man*, p. 38)

This idea resonates with the Vedantic principle of aparokshanubhuti—direct realization—as opposed to second-hand intellectual knowledge. Ashish suggests that we must explore the landscapes of our own consciousness, wading through its mental jungles, before arriving at the still point of clarity. The journey inward, rather than reliance on external doctrines, is the only way to authentic understanding.

Eliot, too, underscores the necessity of personal, experiential knowledge over inherited belief systems. In *East Coker*, *Four Quartets*, he writes:

*"Do not let me hear  
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,  
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,  
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.  
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless."*

Eliot *East Coker* p.14

Like Ashish, Eliot dismisses second-hand wisdom that is merely intellectual or inherited. He critiques the so-called "wisdom of old men," suggesting that true wisdom is not found in received knowledge but in personal surrender and humility. The only real wisdom, according to Eliot, is one that arises from deep introspection and self-awareness—a process akin to Ashish's notion of being both the seeker and the laboratory.

Furthermore, Eliot speaks of navigating the mind's inner chaos in *Burnt Norton*:

*"Only through time time is conquered."*

This aligns with Ashish's idea that reaching the still point requires wading through the mind's illusions. The process of self-inquiry, in both Eliot and Ashish, is not a passive reception of truths but an active engagement—a wrestling with doubt, experience, and inner fragmentation until a moment of stillness and clarity emerges.

'It is often at the most disturbed periods of life that one can first become aware of there being a central being who lives through the experience

undisturbed, even though the thoughts and emotions are in turmoil. When one has recognized its presence, one can learn to nurture that awareness and to stand in its inherent inner stability...undisturbed by the suffering and death of the body. Beyond it lies the un-individualized Unity of Being. But to find that, one must first find oneself.'

-Sri Madhava Ashish

Would this analysis also not fit with T.S. Eliot's personal unhappiness and turmoil in the years of composition of *The Waste Land* (the several years up to publication in 1922)? And his finding of the "central being" by the time he converted to High Anglicanism and then further to the composition of "Four Quartets"?

Another significant intertwining between the two subjects of this Paper lies in Eliot's *The Dry Salvages*, where he speaks of the inadequacy of borrowed knowledge:

"We had the experience but missed the meaning,  
And approach to the meaning restores the  
experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness."

Eliot, *The Dry Salvages* p. 24

Here, Eliot suggests that merely having an experience is insufficient—its meaning must be grasped inwardly, refined through contemplation. This mirrors Ashish's insistence that another person's experience remains "a collection of words and images" unless one relates it to personal understanding.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both Eliot and Ashish argue that Truth cannot be acquired through external authority but must be personally realized. However, their approaches differ slightly:

Ashish, grounded in Indian philosophical traditions, sees the process as a scientific self-

experiment—where the individual must navigate the wilderness of their mind, refining their understanding through direct experience.

Eliot, though influenced by Indian philosophy, frames the search more in Christian and mystical terms, suggesting that humility and surrender are key to transcending intellectual limitations.

Yet, both thinkers arrive at the same conclusion: the still point of wisdom is an inner realization, beyond borrowed truths. Their shared emphasis on first-hand knowledge challenges passive acceptance, urging seekers to plunge into their own consciousness to discover meaning.

Part of the classical structure of *Four Quartets* arises from the Four Elements that each of the Quartets represents:

*Burnt Norton is about the Earth*  
*East Coker about the Air*  
*The Dry Salvages about Water*  
*Little Gidding about Fire*

I propose the addition to Eliot studies of a brand-new Fifth Element underlying *Four Quartets*, no, not the one where Bruce Willis again saves the world by plugging in Milla Jovovich to a mystical alien formation. The quantum theory Fifth Element applicable only to the quantum world, not the other four elements of Einsteinian and Newtonian laws. Leading to the elusive Unified Theory. The Fifth Element I see is that of "the still point of the turning world". The massive weight and velocity of the rotating Earth spins around the still point at its molten metal center. These days, whenever I waver, I return to the final moments of the Madhav Ashish video [Sri Madhava Ashish at Mirtola](#) where he says, "The centre should come alive in you." In the context of this Paper, I feel as though, in that moment, he is holding my hand, guiding me there, his voice firm and unwavering: "Look inside yourself—there lies Eliot's Still Point."

## THE "STILL POINT" IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The idea of the still point in Indian philosophy is deeply embedded in various spiritual traditions, particularly Vedanta, the *Upanishads*, and certain interpretations of Yoga and Buddhist philosophy. The still point represents an unchanging center, the axis around which movement occurs but which itself remains unmoving. It is closely associated with concepts such as Brahman, Shunyata (Emptiness), Turiya (the fourth state of consciousness), and Samadhi (spiritual absorption).

Here are some key references where the still point is found in Indian texts:

### 1. The Upanishads and the Concept of the Unmoving Center

One of the closest parallels to Eliot's still point is found in the *Katha Upanishad* (1.2.21), which speaks of the Self (Atman) as motionless yet swifter than the mind:

"The Self (Atman) is the size of a thumb, dwelling always in the hearts of beings. It is luminous like a smokeless flame. Knowing this Self, one transcends death. There is no other path for liberation."

This verse suggests a center of stillness—an unwavering core that transcends death and movement. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, especially *Burnt Norton*, echoes this paradoxical unity of stillness and motion:

*"At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh  
nor fleshless;*

*Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the  
dance is,*

*But neither arrest nor movement."*

Eliot *Burnt Norton* p. 5

This aligns with the Indian philosophical notion that the Atman is beyond action and inaction, yet is the source of all movement.

### 2. The Bhagavad Gita and the Immovable Presence

In *Bhagavad Gita* 2.24-25, Krishna describes the eternal, immovable, and unchanging Self:

"It cannot be cut, burned, wetted, or dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, and immovable."

This description of the Self (Atman) as *sthanuḥ* (motionless, unshaken) and *acalaḥ* (immovable) resonates deeply with Eliot's still point. Eliot, having studied Sanskrit and the *Gita* during his Harvard years, likely absorbed these metaphysical ideas. Sri Madhava Ashish, deeply rooted in Vedantic thought, also saw spiritual realization as the discovery of this unchanging core amid the flux of life.

### 3. Mandukya Upanishad: The Fourth State (Turiya) as the Still Point

Another significant parallel is found in the *Mandukya Upanishad* (verse 7), which describes Turiya, the fourth state of consciousness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep:

"It is not inwardly conscious, nor outwardly conscious, nor both. It is neither simple consciousness nor unconsciousness. It is unseen, beyond interaction, beyond grasp, beyond signs, beyond thought, beyond expression. It is the essence of the Self alone, the cessation of phenomena, tranquil, blissful, and non-dual. This is the Self; this is to be realized."

The state of Turiya—beyond movement, beyond thought, beyond time—is the ultimate "still point", where all dualities dissolve.

Sri Madhava Ashish, in *What is Man?*, similarly emphasizes self-discovery beyond thought and Time, reinforcing that true knowledge is realized in a state of inner stillness.

## CONNECTING T.S. ELIOT, SRI MADHAVA ASHISH, AND THE INDIAN STILL POINT

### 1. Influence of Vedanta on Eliot

Eliot's concept of the still point is an unmistakable reflection of his exposure to Indian philosophy, especially the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. His poetic meditations on Time, movement, and Eternity resonates with the Vedantic idea that the ultimate Truth is beyond duality—a concept deeply embedded in Turiya, the unchanging Self, and the motionless center in the *Upanishads*.

*"Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)*

*And all shall be well and*

*All manner of thing shall be well*

*When the tongues of flame are in-folded*

*Into the crowned knot of fire*

*And the fire and the rose are one."*

*Eliot Little Gidding p. 39*

### 2. Sri Madhava Ashish's Interpretation of Stillness Beyond Thought

Ashish, in his writings, consistently emphasizes inner stillness as the key to spiritual clarity. He warns against intellectual restlessness and misplaced spiritual seeking, advocating instead for inner awareness and deep contemplation, akin to the Atman described in the *Upanishads*.

In *What is Man?*, he writes:

"We are both scientist and laboratory. For we must search in the one place where we have first-hand knowledge of anything at all, and this is in the root of our own consciousness."

This is a direct parallel to the Upanishadic search for the Self as the unmoving, eternal witness. Both Eliot and Ashish see the still point not as an abstract ideal but as a lived, experiential truth.

### 3. The Timeless Relevance of the Still Point

Both Eliot and Ashish, influenced by Indian philosophy, explore the paradox of movement around stillness. The still point is not about passivity or escape but about rootedness in an eternal reality that allows for action without attachment. This aligns perfectly with the *Bhagavad Gita's* teaching of detached action (*Nishkama Karma*) and the Upanishadic vision of a changeless core beyond temporal existence.

By placing Eliot's poetic still point alongside Ashish's mystical insights and the profound metaphysics of the *Upanishads*, we see a shared vision of transcendence—where the highest truth is found not in restless seeking but in the stillness of realized wisdom.

## T.S. ELIOT, TRADITION AND THE SOIL

This passage from *Little Gidding*:

*"The parched eviscerate soil  
Gapes at the vanity of toil,  
Laughs without mirth.  
This is the death of earth."*

*Eliot Little Gidding p. 33*

is like a concise reprise of "*The Waste Land*" and its symbolic representation of modern society.

This is what we need to get away from, back to traditional ways of living in community. That is the message.

*"These are only hints and guesses,  
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.*

*The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is  
Incarnation.*

*Here the impossible union*

*Of spheres of existence is actual,*

*Here the past and future*

*Are conquered, and reconciled,*

*Where action was otherwise movement*

*Of that which is only moved  
And has in it no source of movement—  
Driven by daemonic, chthonic  
Powers. And right action is freedom  
From past and future also.  
For most of us, this is the aim  
Never here to be realised;  
Who are only undefeated  
Because we have gone on trying;  
We, content at the last  
If our temporal reversion nourishes  
(Not too far from the yew-tree)  
The life of significant soil.”*

Eliot *The Dry Salvages* pgs. 27-28

This is a prime instance of how Eliot's concern and interest in organicism serves to give him a fitting line to end a passage where how to live properly is examined in poetry so dense and compacted that it is almost unequalled in the English language. Oh, if only we could all think and write and live like this.

T.S. Eliot was known to be a man of many, deep interests. Not until recently though with the publication of Jeremy Diaper's "T.S. Eliot and Organicism" did the full extent of his deep interest in agrarian matters and organic farming and responsible stewardship of the land resurface after years of being overlooked. Diaper trawled assiduously through copies of *The Criterion*, *New English Weekly* and *Christian News Letter* for Eliot's numerous articles and contributions to the topic.

This is of course another remarkable shared interest of the two men who are the subject of this Paper.

It is almost as though their pathways away from the arid, atomising modern societies they found themselves living in meant necessarily a move towards agrarian communities and preservations of the traditional care and utilisation of the land, be it India or England. The difference being that although Eliot often went on weekends to the country to visit friends, he was incorrigibly a city dweller. Ashish

lived at Mirtola, a village 10km away from Almora in the Northern state of Uttarakhand, my own much-loved state of forests and farmland, lakes and mountains.

Although the end of this passage from *East Coker* veers into disgust, the majority of it could be read as the sort of cyclical, seasonal, ideal way of living for the High Anglican traditionalist that Eliot became.

*“In that open field  
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too  
close,  
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music  
Of the weak pipe and the little drum  
And see them dancing around the bonfire  
the association of man and woman  
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie~  
A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the  
fire  
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,  
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter  
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,  
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth  
Mirth of those long since under earth  
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,  
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing  
As in their living in the living seasons  
The time of the seasons and the constellations  
The time of milking and the time of harvest  
The time of the coupling of man and woman  
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.  
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.”*

Eliot *East Coker* p.11

This always brings to my mind the image of Ralph Fiennes (who felt compelled to commit to memory all of *Four Quartets* during Lockdown) splaying his

legs and squatting comically at the end of this passage in the film.

## SRI MADHAVA ASHISH'S "SOIL-TO-SOUL" PHILOSOPHY

Sri Madhava Ashish's transformation from Alexander Phipps, a seeker in search of Truth, to a proponent of a "soil-to-soul" philosophy, exemplifies his belief that the health of the soil, the community, and the individual soul are interconnected. Ashish's work at Mirtola Ashram, located in the Central Himalayas, focused on integrating ecological sustainability with spiritual growth. His philosophy emphasized that ecological degradation mirrors spiritual decay. As he writes in *An Open Window*:

"The way we treat the soil reflects the way we treat our own souls. A barren earth is a reflection of a barren spirit" (Ashish, *An Open Window*, p. 72).

This idea draws from the Indian principle of *Rta*, the cosmic order that governs the universe, which stresses harmony and balance. According to Ashish, by nurturing the earth, humans contribute to a greater cosmic harmony, an idea reflected in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna urges Arjuna to perform his duties in accordance with *Dharma* (righteous duty) for the well-being of the entire universe. This sense of ecological responsibility and spiritual interconnectedness is key to Ashish's teachings and emphasizes that the individual soul cannot be separated from the condition of the world around it.

T. S. Eliot also draws on the *Bhagavad Gita* in *The Dry Salvages*

"I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant—

*Among other things—or one way of putting the same thing:*

*That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray*

*Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,*

*Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.*

*And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.*

*You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,  
That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here."*

Eliot *The Dry Salvages* p. 25

and

*"So, Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna*

*On the field of battle.*

*Not fare well,*

*But fare forward, voyagers."*

Eliot *The Dry Salvages* p. 26

Ashish also explores related themes in his book *Man, the Measure of All Things*, where he writes:

*"The measure of man's greatness is not his mastery over nature but his ability to live in harmony with it. We are not masters of the earth; we are its caretakers, the stewards of its health and balance"* (Ashish, *Man, the Measure of All Things*, p. 58).

This ecological spirituality is rooted deeply in Ashish's understanding of the *Upanishads*, where the universe is depicted as an interdependent whole. He thus combines ancient wisdom with contemporary concerns, urging a re-envisioning of humanity's relationship to the earth through the lens of spiritual growth.

In her book, *Faith and Fire: A Way Within* which is about the seven years she spent at the Mirtola Ashram under the leadership of Sri Madhava Ashish, Madhu Tandan mentions that Aropa, the name she uses for Sri Madhava Ashish in the book, emphasized the need "to attain spirituality through hard work" and gave the example of a farmer who tilled the soil. In Tandan's words, "Sri Madhava Ashish had an unwavering commitment to the land. For him farming was a life-long commitment and he was committed to the land. For him it was an act of devotion and he lived and worked by Faith. He, along with the inmates performed backbreaking work in the Ashram." She further says, "By working hard on the ground Aropa is teaching us how to reap spiritual harvest." For Ashish, as was taught to him by his

gurus Yashoda Ma and Sri Krishna Prem, everything was an offering to the Lord. Tandon recounts that her husband Rajiv Tandon and she had to work knee-deep in manure and Ashish turned them into hard-working farmers. Through hard physical labour and pain as a result of performing back-breaking work, Ashish was teaching them to align themselves with suffering, the lesson being to surrender to the Guru.

## T.S. ELIOT AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

T.S. Eliot's engagement with Indian philosophy began during his academic years at Harvard, where he studied Sanskrit and explored Indian spiritual texts, including the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. This study profoundly shaped his poetic worldview, offering a framework through which he sought to reconcile modern fragmentation with spiritual unity. One of the key concepts Eliot drew from Indian thought is the interconnectedness of the self and the universe, as expressed in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

*"As is the self, so is the world. As is the world, so is the self"* (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5.2.1).

This principle of interconnectedness is central to many of Eliot's works, particularly *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses imagery of drought and decay to symbolize the consequences of human disconnection from Nature, while in *Four Quartets*, he meditates on cyclical time and spiritual renewal, two key elements of Indian philosophy.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot writes:

*"Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road"*

(Eliot, *The Waste Land*, p. 86).

This stark imagery evokes the spiritual barrenness of modern society and reflects the ecological crisis of disconnection from Nature, echoing Ashish's concern for the environment as a reflection of the soul's condition. Similarly, Eliot's invocation of peace, "Shantih Shantih Shantih," at the conclusion

of *The Waste Land* is drawn from the *Upanishads* and symbolizes the spiritual calm that transcends material chaos. In the Notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot christianised the Sanskrit word to be approximated by The New Testament Phillipians 4:7 "the Peace of God which passeth all Understanding", stating that ""The Peace which passeth understanding" is a feeble translation of the content of this word."

Eliot's *Four Quartets* takes up the theme of spiritual renewal through detachment and selfless action, concepts that resonate with the Indian philosophy of *Vairagya* (renunciation) and *Nishkama Karma* (selfless action). Eliot expresses this idea when he writes:

*"The only wisdom we can hope to acquire*

*is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless"*

(Eliot, *East Coker*, p. 14).

This echoes the *Bhagavad Gita's* call for humility and surrender as pathways to spiritual liberation, a theme Ashish similarly explores through his spiritual teachings. In one of his interviews posted on the Youtube video [Sri Madhavaa Ashish at Mirtola](#) Ashish says "Dhyaan is not just about meditating in a room, it is also when I am digging potatoes."

## BRIDGING SOIL AND SOUL: THE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERSECTION

Both Ashish and Eliot emphasize the need for a harmonious relationship with Nature. Ashish's work at Mirtola Ashram, which blends traditional Indian agricultural practices with modern sustainability principles, mirrors Eliot's poetic reflections on ecological degradation and his interest in Organicism. In *An Open Window*, Ashish writes:

*"To heal the earth is to heal the self. The rhythms of nature are the rhythms of life itself"* (Ashish, *An Open Window*, p. 85).

The interconnectedness of ecological health and spiritual well-being is central to both Ashish's and Eliot's work. This is reflected in the Indian philosophical concept of cyclical time, which

influences both Ashish and Eliot. Ashish's agricultural practices, which align human activity with the natural cycles of the earth, echo the cyclical view of Time in Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Eliot writes:

*"Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present"*

(Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, p.4).

For both Ashish and Eliot, Time is not linear but cyclical, a perpetual return that mirrors the cycles of nature and the soul's journey toward spiritual renewal.

In any thinking person's journey through Life, similar conclusions drawn from experiences and preoccupations can become beliefs and guiding principles. T.S. Eliot and Sri Madhava Ashish demonstrate this in many overlapping areas, including in their experience even of dreams.

Sri Madhava Ashish: "When you train the mind, dreams become more and more coherent."  
*Dreams* pgs 347,351

T.S. Eliot used images from his dreams which he could not himself interpret satisfactorily in poems such as "Ash Wednesday" and "Marina":

*"Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree  
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety  
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had  
been contained  
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said  
Shall these bones live? shall these  
Bones live? And that which had been contained  
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:  
Because of the goodness of this Lady  
And because of her loveliness, and because  
She honours the Virgin in meditation,  
We shine with brightness. And I who am here  
dissembled  
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love  
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the  
gourd.*

*It is this which recover  
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible  
portions  
Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn  
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown."*  
Eliot *Ash-Wednesday* p. 111

and

*"Who walked between the violet and the violet  
Who walked between  
The various ranks of varied green  
Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,  
Talking of trivial things  
In ignorance and knowledge of eternal dolour  
Who moved among the others as they walked,  
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh  
the springs  
Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand  
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,  
Sovegna vos  
Here are the years that walk between, bearing  
Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring  
One who moves in the time between sleep and  
waking, wearing  
White light folded, sheathing about her, folded.  
The new years walk, restoring  
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring  
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem  
The time. Redeem  
The unread vision in the higher dream  
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.  
The silent sister veiled in white and blue  
Between the yews, behind the garden god,  
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed  
but spoke no word..."*  
Eliot "Ash-Wednesday" pgs.116-117

And from "Marina"

*"What seas what shores what grey rocks and what  
islands*

*What water lapping the bow  
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing  
through the fog  
What images return  
O my daughter."*

Eliot "Marina" p. 131

He would also translate St John Perse's "Anabasis", a total dreamwork if there ever was one. It was undoubtedly a mediation through translation of the vision of another writer, but it had to be sufficiently strong in resonance for Eliot and aligned enough for him to devote such hard work and precious time to the task of collaborative translation.

"For my soul engaged in far matters, a hundred fires in towns wakened by the barking of dogs. . . .

Solitude! our immoderate partisans boasted of our ways, but our thoughts were already encamped beneath other walls:

'I have told no one to wait. ... I hate you all, gently. . . . And what is to be said of this song that you elicit from us? . . .'

Lord of a people of dreams to be led to the Dead Seas, where shall I find the water of night that shall bathe our eyes?

Solitude! squadrons of stars pass the edge of the world, engaging from the kitchens a domestic luminary.

The Allied Kings of Heaven make war over my roof and, lords of the high places, set there their bivouacs.

Let me go alone with the airs of the night, among the pamphleteering Princes, among the falling Bielides! . . .

Soul united in silence to the bitumen of the Dead! our eyelids sewn with needles! praise to the waiting under our eyelids!

The night gives its milk, O take heed! let a honeyed finger touch the lips of the prodigal:

' . . .Fruit of woman, O Sabaeen! . . . ' Betraying the least sober soul and roused from the pure pestilences of night,

in my thoughts I will protest against the activity of

dream; I shall be off with the wild geese, in the sick smell of morning! . . ."

St. John Perse (translated by Eliot) *Anabasis* Pgs 39-41

## CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE: ECOLOGICAL AND EXISTENTIAL RENEWAL

In the context of contemporary ecological crises, Ashish's "soil-to-soul" philosophy offers a model for addressing climate change. His emphasis on sustainable agriculture and community-driven practices aligns with contemporary ecological movements advocating for resilience and sustainability.

Similarly, Eliot's poetry offers a spiritual framework for addressing modern existential crises. His work calls for a return to timeless values of humility, compassion, and interconnectedness, providing a spiritual antidote to the fragmentation of modern life. Eliot also had a passionate interest in the sustainable cultivation of the land through organicism. The wisdom embedded in both Ashish's and Eliot's works is crucial, I contend, in navigating the challenges of the present Climate Change-ravaged day.

Both these men derived significant learning to inform their future views and attitudes from Indian Philosophy.

## CONCLUSION

Sri Madhava Ashish and T.S. Eliot, despite their differing contexts, share a profound commitment to the principles of Indian philosophy. Ashish's "soil-to-soul" philosophy and Eliot's poetic vision both draw from the timeless wisdom of the *Upanishads* and the

*Bhagavad Gita*, emphasizing interconnectedness, sustainability, and spiritual renewal.

This Paper has explored the philosophical intersections between Ashish and Eliot, revealing how their works converge on themes of ecological stewardship and spiritual harmony. Their legacies continue to resonate today, offering guidance for navigating the ecological and existential crises of the modern world.

In “*Words in Air*”, her complete correspondence with Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop says she thinks that T.S. Eliot is a living saint. That probably applied, in my view, to Sri Madhava Ashish too.

*“But to apprehend*

*The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint—  
No occupation either, but something given  
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,  
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.  
For most of us, there is only the unattended  
Moment, the moment in and out of time,  
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,  
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning*

*Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts.”*

Eliot *The Dry Salvages* p. 27

## REFERENCES

- Ashish, S. M. (1989). *An Open Window: Dream as Everyman's Guide to the Spirit*. Mirtola Ashram.
- Ashish, S. M. (1968). *Man, the Measure of All Things*. Mirtola Ashram.
- [Sri Madhavaa Ashish at Mirtola](#) Youtube Video
- Eliot, T. S. (1936). *Collected Poems 1909-1935*. Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- Eliot, T. S. (1943). *Four Quartets*. Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. (1988). Translated by E. H. S. S. R. In *The Upanishads: A New Translation* by Eknath Easwaran.
- St John Perse (1930) Translated by T.S. Eliot. Faber & Faber