

Bhagwad Gita And Hinduism In R.W. Emerson's Works

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Abstract

The present research on The Impact of the Bhagwad Gita on R.W. Emerson shows beyond doubt that R.W. Emerson was heavily influenced by Hinduism. The highest in Western civilization is moving on the path delineated by the Great philosopher Emerson. Thus it is important for all to understand his thoughts for success not only in Western Civilization but also throughout the world. The Bhagwad Gita among other books on true happiness, morality and knowledge is like the Sun in our Solar System. Its effulgence and shining requires no evidence, it is self-evident and also incomparable to any other source of light required for life in the solar system. Its ardent follower Emerson said, I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagwad Gita. It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions that exercise us. In fact R.W. Emerson has made the Bhagwad Gita and Vedic thought an integral part and foundation of Western philosophy.

Keywords: Mohammedanism, effulgence, comprehensively, Christianity, bragging, effulgence

Outline of paper: Newline American Literary Independence was comprehensively influenced and enormously uplifted by Emerson's view and concepts. They are one of the fundamental concepts of American thinking now. In fact Emerson's concepts of own work, own nature, genius, justice, soul and over soul, central doctrine, self reliance, compensation that has been explained in this research paper that the private individual can and also should try to achieve the highest level in all fields I have elaborately discussed about Emerson - I am literary world; Greatness of the Bhagwad Gita; R.W. Emerson's differences with other religions except Hinduism; and the influence of Emerson and through him Sanatan Dharm and the Bhagwad Gita on American society.

Influence of R.W.Emerson : Sanatan Dharm and the Bhagavad Gita on American Society:

The comprehensive, permeating, all encompassing and inspiring influence R.W.Emerson had on the changing American society is eminent, infact central to it. It is undisputable that Emerson was the pre eminent leader of the transcendental movement of mid 19th century. In fact R.W.Emerson was the paramount inspirer and pioneer of modern western philosophy. R.W. Emerson is the intellectual and spiritual progenitor of American Philosophy. His work, *The 31 American scholar* (1837) lifted American thought to a new level-the independence and separateness of American individuality and identity. In the speech R.W.Emerson declared literary independence of the United States urging Americans to create a style of their own and free from Europe. This is widely held so by American intellectuals. In fact Oliver Homes, Senior considered it to be America's "intellectual declaration of independence". This can be considered to be the intellectual opinion of America. I think this affected the Nation's individualism on a higher, deeper and more pervasive level than the merely political declaration of independence. The relevance and influence of the political declaration of Independence in American consciousness is well established by various commentators. American Literary Independence was comprehensively influenced and enormously uplifted by R.W.Emerson's view and concepts. In fact they are one of the fundamental concepts of American thinking now. Literary independence helped R.W.Emerson in developing a new and united culture of Americans, apart from the culture of their European ethnic heritage. The largest group of white Americans then was ethnic Germans. Political power was dominated by Ethnic English and was Ethnic English oriented at the time of American war of Independence. This led to a repression of Ethnic German political influence in America, which could have caused a backlash or a reaction at a later stage. Political power changed after the American victory in American war of Independence with French Military support. However independent America continued with English as its cultural language and also the lingua franca. Due to R.W.Emerson at the time of the Civil War this multi Ethnic White America of European heritage united itself in an American cultural identity. In my opinion due to the forging of a separate and inclusive United American intellectual identity, the plurality of German ethnic people among White Americans were not swayed by Ethnic considerations into siding with Nazi Germany in the Second World War. This avoided a catastrophe on France and England during the Second World War. R.W.Emerson's mode of dissemination of his thoughts was through numerous essays which were published and freely distributed, along with his exhaustive and more than 1500 public lectures through out the country. This showed his belief in free dissemination and receiving of ideas, right of people to hold and spread opinions, and to participate in the country's culture, all today's basic human rights and essential unchangeable part of Modern America. In fact Emerson's concepts of 'own work', 'own nature', 'genius', 'justice', 'soul and Over soul', 'central doctrine', 'self reliance',

‘compensation’ that I have explained in the paper show that the ‘private’ individual can and also should try to achieve the highest level in any and all fields. I have shown this also in ‘central doctrine’.

The state is hence required to facilitate an individual’s progress as stated. This can be recognized today as concepts of democracy, socialism, capitalism, an individual’s rights to equality, freedom, life and liberty, information, education, work, justice. All these are recognizable in the UN human rights declaration of 1948 and also in constitutions framed around the world subsequently. The pre eminent position of US in early post World War 2 UN is well known. It shows the depth of influence exerted by R.W.Emerson on the world. Emerson provided a great and vital thrust to these ideas through his views and works being a ‘great soul’ (see ‘Self reliance’). Now we will see his influence on another prominent transcendental thinker, Thoreau. In 1837, R.W.Emerson befriended Henry David Thoreau. R.W.Emerson asked Thoreau, "Do you keep a journal?" The question had a permanent influence on Thoreau. R.W. Emerson's own journal consists of 16 large volumes, in the Harvard University Press edition published between 1960 and 1982. Some scholars consider the journal to be R.W.Emerson's key literary work. So we see R.W.Emerson preached what he practiced. He freely shared his insight, learning and knowledge so that others and through them society may gain from it, instead of holding on to it merely to increase his own importance. This is as per Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita imparting full knowledge to all through his discourse to his disciple Arjun and the disciple of Rishi Vedvyas, Sanjay. Through them this discourse became available to all. The Transcendentalists created a fountain of thought and originality and experimentation during the 1830s and 1840s. The writings produced by the movement endured and is today recognized as a corpus of American classics. They provided a powerful inspiration and practical guidance to later social reform movements such as the movement of Mahatma Gandhi and the American civil rights movements of 1960s. Gandhi later influenced Madiba of South Africa in his actions against apartheid and his actions of creating a post apartheid society. These incorporated or were similar to Thoreau’s principle of Non-violent resistance to oppressive, unresponsive and obstructive government. R.W.Emerson’s concepts also influenced the secularism of George Holyoake as I have shown in ‘Experience’. R.W.Emerson’s actions and lectures on abolition of slavery highlighted 33 the path of changing a Government from within. R.W.Emerson highlighted the importance of violence and War for achieving correct aims such as abolition and concept of duty of the individual. This is shown through his appreciation of the abolitionist John Brown and his methods of violence for achieving correct aims. This is also shown by Emerson’s support of the Civil War which was fought for abolition. R.W.Emerson’s concepts on individual

and society actually worked against all form of oppressive Government. This included colonialism. They inspired independence movements across the globe.

Thus they influenced the world. R.W.Emerson as a ‘great soul’ (see Self Reliance) and central figure of Western philosophy inspired the entire age and the world. Thus these writings were relevant and applicable for later times. R.W.Emerson was undoubtedly the towering personality and inspiration for the transcendentalist movement. There is no doubt that R.W.Emerson became the leading voice of American intellect and culture. He was nicknamed the Concord Sage. Herman Melville was initially a critic of R.W.Emerson and thought he had ‘a defect in the region of the heart’ and a ‘self conceit so intensely intellectual that at first one hesitates to call it by its right name’. Later Herman changed his views and stated that R.W.Emerson was ‘a great man’. This shows opposition to R.W.Emerson ultimately through understanding evolved into admiration and inspiration. I cannot help noticing that Herman would have known that R.W.Emerson had concluded “while Jesus was a great man, he was not God.” Another transcendentalist and minister, Theodore Parker, noticed R.W.Emerson’s inspirational qualities “The brilliant genius of Emerson rose in the winter nights, and hung over Boston, drawing the ingenuous young people to look up to that great new star, a beauty and a mystery which charmed for the moment, while it gave also perennial inspiration, as it led them forward along new paths, and towards new hopes”. 8 R.W.Emerson’s contemporaries such as Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau were influenced by his work. It also influenced thinkers and writers in the entire world and for all time especially more so in the United States. It was not possible for any intellectual or thinker from this time to be either unaware or uninfluenced by the transcendental movement. The Transcendentalist movement became universally known and respected through out the world after sweeping through American thought and permeating its culture. Though R.W.Emerson may not have been referred to or evoked in some periods of American culture, but his concepts 34 and ideas are the relevant subject matter in every period. The words of his junior contemporary Swami Vivekanada are especially pertinent since he is a universally established authority on Bhagvad Gita, in fact a divine saintly authority. He said to Americans, “I would advise those of you who have not read that book (Bhagvad Gita) to read it. If you only knew how much it has influenced your own country even! If you want to know the source of Emerson’s inspiration, it is this book, the Gita. He (Emerson) went to see Carlyle, and Carlyle made him a present of the Gita (Bhagvad Gita); and that little book is responsible for the Concord Movement. All the broad movements in America in one way or the other are indebted to the Concord Party. The central figure of the Gita is Krishna.” Vivekananda had an idea of the influence of the Bhagavad Gita on Emerson and his influence on American society. However I

have explained these clearly and comprehensively in my paper. For this reason I am quoting Vivekananda on the Bhagavad Gita and Vedic Dharm. I am also quoting his Guru and other Vedic saints. R.W.Emerson influenced his contemporary thinkers and has continued to influence thinkers and writers and cultural thinking throughout the world. As per the New York Times, “There is little disagreement that Emerson was the most influential writer of 19th century America, though these days he is largely the concern of scholars. Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau and William James were all positive Emersonians, while Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James were Emersonians in denial, though they set themselves in opposition to the sage there was no escaping his influence. To T.S.Eliot, R.W.Emerson’s essays were an an ‘encumbrance’ (probably since they were so, all pervading and comprehensive as to cover everything). Waldo the sage was eclipsed from 1914 until 1965, when he returned to shine, after surviving in the work of major American poets like Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and Hartcrane”.

Emerson’s Essay series “Conduct of life”- ‘Fate’ , ‘Power’ , ‘Wealth’ , ‘Culture’ , ‘Behaviour’ , ‘Worship’ , ‘Consideration by the way’ , ‘Beauty’ and ‘Illusions’ and the Bhagavad Gita:

Influence of the Bhagavad Gita on Emerson’s essay ‘Conduct of life’-

‘Fate’: Particularly Emerson’s concept of “Fate”, “Providence”- Emerson’s explanation of the life of Lincoln through his concept of “Providence”- Development on the thought of Jesus by Emerson. It is widely held as per Hindu Vedic Darshan (philosophy) that there exists a Law of Karm (Action). (I have explained this in ‘Compensation’) and the Yoga of Action (Karm Yog). (I have explained this in ‘Self Reliance’ and ‘Compensation’). This is given in the Bhagavad Gita. Within the Law of Karm a person has Destiny, or Fate (Bhagya). Those aspects of Destiny that can be easily changed with little efforts are called ‘Adhridh’ and those that may be changed only with great effort or even not at all are called ‘Dhrid’. A person can change his fate through actual action (called Kriya Shakti) and thought (Thought about action contemplated and one’s way of thinking or constitution of thought called Iccha Shakti). The sum total of all Karm is called Sanchit Karm. Out of this the Karm which has manifested for the present life is called Parabdha. We see the views of the Vedic saint Sri Rama Krishna, “The thing is that everyone must reap the result of his past Karma. One must admit the influence of tendencies, inherited from past births and the results of the parabdha karma. ”. We will now see the similarity of these concepts with concepts in Emerson’s essay ‘Fate’. While Jesus could understand and teach about thought about action it was only R.W.Emerson who could understand and teach this along with the still higher aspect of Iccha Shakti; one’s way of thinking or constitution of one’s thought.

The Bhagavad Gita alludes to a person's freedom of choice of thought and action as seen in the example of Arjun of the Bhagavad Gita. Being a crest jewel work of Vedanta it does not exhaustively cover all aspects which are to be understood through the Vedas and Puranas.

R.W.Emerson states, “— are hints of ferocity in the interiors of nature. Let us not deny it up and down. Providence has a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end, and it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge, mixed instrumentalities or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neck cloth of a student in divinity”. We see in the sub-heads of ‘Nature’ and ‘Compensation’ that nature (Prakriti) follows certain laws. Life is governed by the Law of Karm. Neither ‘pampers’. The effects or fruits of Karm are ‘incalculable’ by the doer and shaped in destiny because the doer in attachment wants ‘reward’ and is clouded by it whereas those who surrender reward as per Karm Yog not . Giving up of fruit or reward of actions and thus following duty is the attitude of the ‘harmonized’ one. R.W.Emerson is of the same view on the ‘avarice of reward’. The only solution is Karm Yog wherein the doer is asked to surrender the fruits of action. that Emerson shuns ‘winnings’ (which is the same as fruits or reward) hence follows this solution of Karm Yog. This leads to Brahman realization. Brahman realization is the ultimate aim of all life. Hence ‘Providence’ is a ‘terrific benefactor’. Hence this is the explanation of R.W.Emerson's ‘Providence’.

R.W.Emerson states, “It was a poetic attempt to lift this mountain of Fate, to reconcile this despotism of race with liberty, which led the Hindoos to say, "Fate is nothing but the deeds committed in a prior state of existence." I find the coincidence of the extremes of eastern and western speculation in the daring statement of Schelling, "there is in every man a certain feeling, that he has been what he is from all eternity, and by no means became such in time." To say it less sublimely, — in the history of the individual is always an account of his condition, and he knows himself to be a party to his present estate.” This means an individual is his acts, thought, hence there is no scope for final Judgement Day. A person's situation is shaped by his Karm. So a person is judged every instant by the law of Karm. This aspect of the Law of Karm is explained in ‘Compensation’. R.W.Emerson brings out his unique and correct understanding of unity of experience in Eastern and western thought on Fate. Hence Fate as destiny is chiseled by the man's past deeds (last Karm) and thoughts (Iccha Sakti). This is as per the Bhagavad Gita Shlokas quoted above, particularly of Chapter14 and 16. Nature follows Fate, ‘Providence’ as seen above. Hence it is ‘ferocious’ and ‘no sentimentalist’. A person's condition is made by his fate or destiny. This manifests as ‘prarabdh karm’, fate for the present life. Fate can also be changed by changing ones thought and way of thinking (Iccha Shakti) as seen above. Hence “—

in the history of the individual is always an account of his condition, and he knows himself to be a party to his present estate.” Additionally on a more philosophical level the true nature of soul free of identity is unity with Brahman.

सवभष ूतस्थम त्तम नांसवभष ूत तन च त्तमतन | ईतेयोगयुक्त त्तम सवषत्र समदशषनः ॥

Wikins rendered this verse in the following words: “ The man whose mind is imbued with this devotion, and looketh on all things alike, beholdeth the supreme soul in all things and all things in supreme soul „ In the verse here, the word Atma has to be understood as synonym or `Brahma „or God , the supreme soul ; in many Upanishads and most prominently in the ` “kathopanishads „ `atman „ and `Brahma „ have been regarded as signifying the same thing thus , RW’s assertion that ` god is man and exists in us and we in him „is truly upanishadic and is deeply rooted in the Bhagwad Gita.

Conclusion: In my research paper I have analyzed, that Emerson is in fact a Vedic saint and a great soul who understood and perceived the Vedas. He developed and planted Vedic concepts in Western culture. In contrast to peace, Christianity spread through violence as observed by Swami Vivekananda “Where has your Christianity succeeded without the sword? Show me one place in the whole world –one, I say, throughout the history of the Christian religion- one; I do not want two. I know how your forefathers were converted. They had to be converted or killed; that was all. What can you do better than Mohammedanism, with all your bragging?” and “Blessed are the peace makers; they shall enjoy the earth” (meaning the Vedic Hindu Dharm). We see Swami Vivekananda similar to R.W.Emerson appreciates Hindu Dharm for ‘Peace’. Swami Vivekananda further criticizes the violence of Christians “The Jews and the Arabs were the Fathers of Christianity, and how they have been persecuted by the Christians! Swami Vivekananda states “Where can Christianity show such an achievement (of not annihilating peoples)? Where are, today, the Arabs of Spain, and the aboriginal races of America? What treatment are the Christians according to the European Jews? (meaning they were persecuted and largely exterminated by Christianity)... Whatever heights of progress Europe has attained, every one of them was gained by its revolt against Christianity-by its rising against the Gospel.”

Specifically I have researched the following concepts of R.W.Emerson which I have also shown to be concepts of the Bhagavad Gita . I have researched R.W.Emerson’s concepts of Self Reliance, own work, genius, own nature, own thought, character, God within, Great Soul, cause and effect, truth, integrity, idealist, I, identity, thinker, incarnation, intuition, nature, soul, over soul, deity, excess of faith and compensation are contained in the Bhagavad Gita. All have to

compulsorily follow Dharm and the Yogas on reaching correct thought. Morals of all are required to be as per Vedic Dharm. R.W.Emerson's views on Slavery are according to the Bhagavad Gita. Emerson believes in unity of soul with Brahman, Brahman realization, Law of Karm.Dharm, Bhakti and Karm Yogas. I have researched Emerson considers these to be 'transcendental' concepts. I have researched, further development of Christianity before and after Jesus in the observations of R.W.Emerson, further development of Christianity by R.W.Emerson, Jesus not a special sole divinity, R.W. Emerson's appreciation of going beyond the three gunas, beyond Satva, Bhakti or Eternal love for God with form. I have researched that R.W.Emerson's thought diminished Persecution of Jews in Christian society of the West. I have researched on R.W.Emerson's influence on Lincoln. I have researched Emerson's concept of futility of grief over death is as per Vedic concept. We see R.W.Emerson's concept of Compensation and its sameness with the Bhagavad Gita concept of Law of Karm. We see the 'moral aim' of all according to R.W.Emerson is as per Sanatan Vedic Hindu Dharm, all have to compulsorily follow them. I have researched R.W.Emerson's Central doctrine is as per the Bhagavad Gita. I have researched that as per the thought of Emerson and Swami Vivekananda all have to follow the caste system (Jati Varnashram) on reaching correct thought. I have researched that R.W. Emerson's concept of Fate, power, wealth, culture, behavior, worship, good of evil, beauty, identity, illusions is as per Vedic concept. R.W.Emerson believes in Vedic deities. In the nine essays of 'Conduct of Life' I have shown that Emerson's concept of 'Conduct of Life' is as per the Bhagavad Gita.

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