Chapter V
Emerson is an extraordinary optimist. He regards even evil as good in the making. And nature, in which all good and evil co-exist, is to him an embodiment of philosophy and theology (W, VI, 49). It seems Emerson's world is a large classroom in which the students learn by making errors. The creator of this classroom of the world is the Self that teaches by the method of rewards and punishments. This favourite method of the Self is the law of Compensation in Emerson's terminology.

We find great optimism in the Gita, too, even with regard to evil. In chapter II we are told: “Men who are endued with true wisdom are unmindful of good and evil in this world” (C.W. 40, II, 50). The law of Karma is the way of the Self in the Gita to reward the good and punish and correct the evil doing. There is ample scope for the evil to become good. In chapter IX Krishna says: “If one whose ways are ever so evil, serve me alone, he is as respectful as the just man . . . he soon becometh of a virtuous spirit” (C.W. 82, IX, 30, 31).

Many scholars have criticised Emerson for what they call his shallow vision of evil in this world. They argue that he ignored injustice, pain and suffering in this world and considered these as part of the Beautiful Necessity, the Self. It seems, however, that Emerson had formulated a philosophy of the Self, the liberating Self, as we may call it, which kept him optimistic throughout his life and enabled him to deal successfully even with the misfortunes in his life. Christy seems right when he points out about him: “He saw evil and he suffered pain, but they could not touch him” and “even the loss of a bride and his first born in a brief time left no deep scar.” His philosophy of the Self sustained him. In his life “it was no blindness to pain and suffering
that made him forget the rain soaked, barefooted Manchester child.”
The reality is different. “His optimism, instead of being blindness or indifference, is a most persistent type of therapeutics.”² It is the Self that has liberated him from a world view of suffering in this world. “To him this is the best of all possible worlds, and the best of all possible times.” There is no “disorder or evil.” The “order is the absolute law” and “disorder is but a phenomenon.”³

Emerson did not hold the Self responsible for evil and he did not either choose to blame Satan for it as it occurs in the Persian mythology or as his ancestors had done. “Had he done so, he would have been traitor to his belief in the Universal Oneness of ‘The Over-Soul’.”⁴ The Over-Soul, the Self, the Beautiful Necessity carries in it the disparate elements and “secures that all is made of one piece; the plaintiff and defendant, friend and enemy, the animal and planet, food and eater are of one kind” (W, VI, 49). Emerson at the end of his essay “Fate” suggests three times that we should build altars to the Beautiful Necessity (W, VI, 48, 49). The Self contains all and is the “Law” that “rules throughout existence” (W, VI, 49).

The Self in the Gita is akin to the Self in Emerson. It contains all- the good and the evil, and is regarded as worthy of worship. In chapter X Krishna points out that the “various qualities incident to natural beings” like “humility, meekness, pleasure and pain; birth and death, fear and courage . . . renown and infamy, all distinctly come from me” (C.W. 83, X, 4, 5). In chapter XI the Self is praised lavishly by Arjuna: “Reverence! Reverence be unto thee a thousand times repeated! Again and again Reverence. . . O thou art all in all! . . . Thou includest all things, wherefore thou art all things” (C.W. 95, XI, 40). This praise is similar to Emerson’s praise for the Beautiful Necessity. In chapter VIII the Self is referred to as “divine necessity” in the Gita,
too (C.W. 75, VIII, 19).

The Self in Emerson works through nature which is created by it. The human beings exist and live in it. It is (as also noted earlier) the visible and the invisible side of the Self's creative power working eternally in the universe according to the will of the Self. It is the "result" of the "final cause of this world" and offers mankind "a multitude of uses." It is "not only the material, but is also the process and the result" (W, I, 12, 13). In the Gita, too, as in Emerson, the human beings exist and operate in nature which embodies the system of the Self for them. In chapter IX Krishna says: "This whole world was spread abroad by me in my invisible form . . . My creative spirit is the keeper of all things . . . Understand that all things rest in me." It is added: "By my supervision nature produceth both the moveable and the immoveable . . . from this source...the universe resolveth" (C.W. 78, 79, IX, 4, 5, 10).

In their life in nature, the human beings in the world of Emerson and in the world of the Gita, face certain limitations, a few of which are ordained and inescapable. In chapter II we studied the limitations of human beings with respect to Emerson's philosophy of life, and in chapter III we studied the human limitations as visualized in the Gita. In chapter IV we compared the two viewpoints. In addition, we studied also the concept of the Self separately first and then together. Our findings can now be summed up.

In Emerson and in the Gita we have tried to find out how far man is free to act in pursuit of happiness and success and what difficulties or conditions lie on the way. We shall first sum up the common points in Emerson and in the Gita with respect to the limiting circumstances in human life. The first condition laid down in the system of the Self for man is that he has to lead a life devoted to virtue (which comprises the sum-total of the socially desirable qualities like honesty,
justice, humility, welfare of mankind, dutifulness, etc.). About this condition for human beings Emerson says: “The limitation is impassable by any insight of man” (W, VI, 21). In the Gita Krishna says that he appears from age to age “for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked and the establishment of virtue” (C.W. 52, IV, 7, 8).

Next, the pleasures of the senses have to be moderately enjoyed. In Emerson the surrender to the gratification of the senses is treated as a revolt against the Self (W, II, 105, 06). In the Gita this point is stressed throughout. In chapter II the man who abandons all “lusts of the flesh” and who “walketh without inordinate desires” is regarded as ideal (C.W. 43, II, 71).

Though this condition is laid down, human beings, quite intriguingly, have a moral or a material bias from birth (W, VI, 12). The Gita mentions two types of people as born in this world: those born with a divine destiny and those born with an evil destiny (C.W. 115, 16, XVI, 7). A difference of opinion has to be noted here. Emerson would not condemn the people with a material bias so severely as the Gita does. This is a cultural difference. In the Gita those having a material bias are the people with an evil destiny and are bound for hell.

The next limitation of human beings ordained in nature is that they lead generally a life at the level of appearances, a life of illusion created by the senses, which obstructs their vision of reality. “Children, youths, adults and old men, all are led by one bawble or another” (W, VI, 313). The illusion is created by the Self through nature: “The chapter of fascinations is very long. Great is paint, nay, God is the painter” (W, VI, 312, 13). In the Gita the life of illusion comes directly from the Self. Krishna says that the “whole of this world” is “bewildered by the influence” of these “three-fold qualities of nature,” which create illusion. He adds: “This my divine and supernatural power is hard to
be overcome” (C.W. 70, VII, 13, 14).

Next, each human being has a particular constitution designed for him or her in nature. Emerson remarks in “Illusions”: “Men who make themselves felt avail themselves of a certain fate in their constitution which they know how to use” (W, VI, 317). In the Gita mankind is divided into four categories-Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vasya and Sudra, who have their “respective duties” “determined by the qualities which are in their constitutions” (C.W. 130, XVIII, 41).

Constitution is an important factor in the making of an individual in Emerson and in the Gita. Emerson would not, however, divide mankind into any categories as the Gita does. He, however, regards temperament and subjectiveness as two determinants of human constitution. Temperament is the “veto or limitation power in the constitution” (W, III, 54) and subjectiveness is “our constitutional necessity of seeing things under private aspects, or saturated with our humours” (W, III, 81). In the Gita, too, temperament and subjectiveness affect the constitution. They are the result of the individual’s interaction with the three qualities of nature according to his susceptibility to their influence. Heredity is yet another factor in the constitution in Emerson. “Men are what their mothers made them” (W, VI, 10) and we can't “expect poetry from this engineer or a chemical discovery from that jobber” (W, VI, 10). In the Gita this approach is made from a different angle. The individual decides his own heredity in the course of his several life times.

Being unsteady and moving away from the place of one’s duty is the next limitation. In Emerson this shortcoming surfaces in the human habit of travelling for pleasure which is “a fool’s paradise” (W, II, 81). In the Gita this state of mind is described as “distraction of mind.” It is suggested that one ought to be “pleased with whatever cometh to pass”
and one should be “of a steady mind” (C.W. 100, XII, 16, 19). Craving and praying for material gains is another limitation of human nature. Emerson says that “prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft” (W, II, 77). In the Gita the pursuit of material gains is severely condemned throughout. One is advised to work without the desire for fruit.

Cowardice and indifference to the needs of the present, too, are part of the limiting circumstance for human beings. (They limit the individual’s chances of success and happiness). In Emerson and in the Gita it is strongly stressed that one ought to guard against these defects. Next, lack of faith in the Self, attachment to one’s family, friends and society and having an excessive regard for great men and books (and their slavish imitation), all these are condemned as shortcomings to be got rid of. The gods and the Vedas in the Gita and the great men and books in Emerson are regarded as unworthy of slavish regard or imitation. In pursuit of happiness and success, the established religion is yet another drawback in human life. The historical Christianity in Emerson is what the religion represented by the Vedas and the gods is in the Gita. The established religion bewilders and misleads man and makes him a slave to tradition.

The next limitation faced by mankind is that life in this world is generally full of sorrow and suffering. In “Experience” Emerson says: “Every roof is agreeable to the eye until it is lifted” (W, III, 47). In the Gita in chapter VIII the world is described as “the finite mansion of pain and sorrow” (C.W. 75, VIII, 15). In the verse in question the world is referred to as “duhkhalyam” the house of sorrow (pain). It may, however, be noted here while listing the similarities of perception that the Gita genuinely regards the world as a sorrowful place, with the determined aim to liberate mankind from the cycle of birth and death,
but in Emerson the criticism of life in this world is just a passing phase. This limitation in Emerson is not so great as it is in the *Gita*.

The next human limitation is that there is an eternal struggle going on between the spirit and matter in life: “mind and matter are in perpetual tilt and balance” (W, VI, 43). There are “odious facts in nature”. This is "Fate", “the element running through entire nature, known to us as limitation” (W, VI, 19, 20). There are the “diseases, the elements, fortune, gravity, lightning” and they “respect no persons.” Emerson concludes this point: “Providence has a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end” (W, VI, 7, 8).

In the *Gita*, we find that the world has come into being through a union of Prakreetee and Pooroosh, the matter and spirit: “The Pooroosh resideth in the Prakreetee and partaketh of those qualities which proceed from the Prakreetee.” With the interaction between Pooroosh and Prakreetee the mankind has the experience of pleasure and pain because the Pooroosh is the “principle which operateth in the sensation of pain and pleasure” (C.W. 104, XIII, 20, 21).

Evil is the next limitation of mankind. It has, however, no essence or independent existence. It is darkness, the absence of light. It is just the absence of knowledge or virtue. This point is unequivocally stressed in Emerson and in the *Gita*. There is no permanent existence of evil. The last point in our discussion of the similarities of perception relating to human limitations is that the eternal soul of the Self is eternally bound to the human beings who are mortal. Mortality is the fate of all human beings. In the *Gita* salvation is possible for individuals, and at the end of many births there can be an eternal absorption in the Self, which is, of course, a remote possibility. Emerson, however, is concerned only with this life.

We now take up the concept of the (liberating) Self. In Emerson
and in the *Gita* the Self offers hope to human beings of their liberation from all their troubles in life. About the inevitable limitations of human life Emerson says in “Fate”: “The too much contemplation of these limits induces meanness.” One ought to look “the other way.” The “practical view is the other” (W, VI, 23). The other way is the Self that liberates.

As we have noted already, the Self in Emerson and in the *Gita* is concealed behind the human self. As early as in 1837 Emerson felt this difficulty very seriously and wrote in his journals: “As a plant in the earth so I grow in God. I am only a form of him . . . I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, I am God, by transferring my Me out of the flimsy and unclean precincts of my body, my private will.” But the problem is “yet why not always so?” He writes further, “that in certain moments I have known that I existed directly from God, and am, as it were his organ. And in my ultimate consciousness AM He.” But then “the contradictory fact is familiar, that I am a surprised spectator and learner of all my life.”

The ‘flimsy’ and ‘unclean precincts’ of ‘body’ and ‘private will’ of the above passage are indicated in the *Gita* as operations of the senses in life in “seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving,” etc. (C.W. 58, V, 8, 9) and these make the mundane self of man. Emerson’s idea of himself as the organ of the Self is practically available in the *Gita* in Krishna’s advice to Arjuna to become his agent: “Be thou alone the immediate agent” (C.W. 93, XI, 33). (The resemblances of ideas, perhaps, point to the influence of the *Gita*, which we shall discuss a little later.)

Despite the difficulties perceived by Emerson on the way to the Self, he did not allow his faith in the Self to break. Rather, it seems he overpowered the difficulties in his way to a considerable degree. This
becomes evident in “Self-Reliance.” Emerson's transcendental vision of the Self is noteworthy in the following lines (“my perception of it is as much a fact as the sun,” W, II, 65 and): “The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right and calms itself with knowing that all things go well” (W, II, 69). Even in “Experience” which is the saddest of his essays he admits that he receives from the Self more than he deserves: “The benefit overran the merit the first day and has overrun the merit ever since. The merit, itself, so called, I reckon part of the receiving” (W, III, 84).

It seems, as the time passed, Emerson was liberated fully by the Self. He writes in “Fate” that that day is “the great day of the feast of life” when one’s eyes from within open to the oneness of things and to the omnipresence of the Self. Then one “sees that what is must be and ought to be, or is the best” (W, VI, 25). (This happens when one’s mundane self is fully overpowered and one sees the Self everywhere.) The state of mind referred to above seems to be the state of complete liberation from the troubles of life. In the Gita in chapter XII the man dear to Krishna is described as one who is of a steady mind and who accepts life as it is and is “pleased with whatever cometh to pass” (C.W. 100, XII, 19). In chapter VI the man united with the Self is described as one who “looketh on all things alike, beholdeth the supreme soul in all things, and all things in the supreme soul” (C.W. 65, VI, 29). It is also pointed out: “Supreme happiness attendeth the man whose mind is thus at peace” (C.W. 65, VI, 27).

Emerson elaborates his experience (of his union with the Self) further in "Fate": “This beatitude dips from on high down on us and we see. It is not in us so much as we are in it” (W, VI 25). He repeats: “It is not in us, but we are in it. It is of the Maker, not of what is made”
(W, VI, 26). He adds: “where it shines nature [the mundane self of man included] is no longer intrusive . . . The world of men show like a comedy without laughter: populations, interests, government, history, it is all toy figures in a toy house” (W, VI, 26). This is “the majesty into which we have suddenly mounted, the impersonality, the scorn of egotisms . . . now we are as men in a balloon, and do not think so much of the point we have left or the point we would make, as of the liberty and glory of the way” (W, VI, 27). This seems to be the state of mind of the man liberated by the Self from all the worries in life.

In the *Gita* we find a similar quality and measure of liberation of the individual from his difficulties in life. The man who overcomes his mundane self and unites with the Self is able to obtain “happiness supreme.” “In this happiness is born to him an exemption from all his troubles; and his mind being thus at ease, wisdom presently floweth to him from all sides” (C.W. 42, II, 64, 65). He becomes “acquainted with that boundless pleasure which is far more worthy of understanding than that which ariseth from the senses and he is not moved by the severest pain” (C.W. 64, 65, VI, 21, 22). In chapter III such a man is described as “self-delighted”, “self-satisfied” and “happy in his own soul” “and there is not, in all things which have been created, any object on which he may place dependance.” He has “no interest either in that which is done, or that which is not done” (C.W. 46, III, 17, 18). To him heat, cold, pain, pleasure, honour, disgrace make no difference. To him “gold, iron and stones are the same” (C.W. 63, VI, 7, 8). Friends and enemies or “those who stand aloof or go between” are “the same” to him (C.W. 63, VI, 9).

The basic condition for a union with the Self in Emerson and in the *Gita* is the coming out of the individual from the influence of the mundane self in him. His mundane self is (his false individuality or)
that part of him which keeps him attached to the world, its attractions and expectations under the influence of nature’s illusion. “The superficial results of the action of the [mundane] self must be distinguished from the less visible but more profound thoughts of the Self.” Emerson emphasises the choice of the “constitution” which is the choice of the Self within. “Such choosing is a kind of affirmation of the innate and universal Self, a realization of it.” In the Gita the man, who overpowers within himself the influence of the three qualities of nature, which make his mundane self, is united with the Self. He is supposed at the same time to follow his constitution.

As the three qualities of nature through their influence on man decide the nature and quality of his mundane self in the Gita, the influence of the tradition in society decides the nature and quality of the mundane self of man in Emerson. One's overcoming of this self and the consequent union with the Self is all Emerson's Transcendentalism is about. Emerson “once suggested that if a person wished to know what Transcendentalism was he should empty his mind of everything coming from tradition and the rest would be Transcendentalism.” That means a life in the Self through a union with the Self.

Transcendentalism was the movement, in the 19th century U.S.A., started by Emerson to propagate his philosophy of the Self. According to Donald M Koster he was the “foremost spokesman” of American Transcendentalism. The word ‘Transcendentalism’ was first used by Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher “to designate the intuitive method of reaching truth.” Kant died in 1804 (about a year after Emerson's birth). Emerson’s transcendentalism was, however, something of his own making. Denton J. Snider remarks in this regard that “let it be said that it is doubtless Emerson's own designation of his
own idea, even if he found, as he says, the term already in German philosophy.”12 Snider says that we have “an early glimpse of its existence hinted in a letter to Carlyle, dated March 12, 1835, in which Emerson speaks of The Transcendentalist, the name of a new journal about to be started, in which he has evidently a good deal of interest.”13 And “even a kind of Transcendental club, composed of a group of young men, of whom he seems to be the disguised motive power, peeps out modestly in the same letter.”14 And if we want to “fix the birth time of the American period bearing that name, it would be somewhere near the publication of Emerson's Nature (1836) or the appearance of the first number of the Dial (July, 1840), or the formation of the Brook Farm Institute or Community as it was oftenest called, near Boston (1841).”15

At the beginning, Transcendentalism was a derisive term in New England but it “came in time to be accepted with pleasure and pride by its exponents.”16 The ideas presented by it came to be known as “the Newness, the New Views, the New School, the Intuitional philosophy and the Movement.”17 It started “as a revolt against historical Christianity.” It was “a protest movement within the Unitarian Church in New England.” It embodied a “quest for authentic religious experience” and it “rejected forms, creeds, rites and verbal explanations.” Rather, “it sought to penetrate to the heart of things by a direct immediate encounter with reality.”18 To us Transcendentalism means Emerson's philosophy of the liberating Self which seeks to transcend the bounds of human troubles. The Unitarians of the time, however, helped Emerson in bringing his philosophy to the forefront. Transcendentalism shared three fundamental ideas with the Unitarians in its opposition to the Calvinism. It rejected the idea of the Trinity and declared its belief in one God. Jesus is his son and messenger and is
human and not divine. Secondly, it “opposed the exclusive and sectarian nature of Calvinism,” and thirdly, it “opposed most emphatically the Calvinist emphasis on sin and on its violent punishment in fire.”

Although all Emerson's writings may be termed as transcendental in nature, some of his works have been considered as specially important in their contribution to the movement. Perry Miller believes that “an anthology of the basic texts of Transcendentalism would perforce include” his “little book of 1836, Nature, his two seminal orations--The American Scholar of 1837 and the Divinity School Address of 1838” and “his classic essays-- ‘Self-Reliance,’ ‘The Over-Soul,’ ‘Fate,’ and ‘Experience’.” According to Brian M Barbour, Emerson's *Nature* is the “original and probably the best systematic expression of the transcendental philosophy.”

From the resemblances between Emerson's transcendental philosophy and the philosophy in the *Gita* it seems that the reading of the *Gita* had its impact on him to a considerable degree. There are, however, critics who believe that Emerson had formulated his philosophy in full before he read the *Gita*. F. I. Carpenter examines the list of Emerson's readings and points out that the *Gita* appears in 1845. But at the same time he also mentions that in 1830 among his notes is listed The Mahabharat, one of the sacred books of India. Examining his various sources, Carpenter concludes: “Thus gathering the evidence together, we find that probably Emerson had read no complete book of Hindu literature before 1836” when he published his *Nature* “which has been said to contain all of his philosophic ideas in miniature.”

Here it will be quite useful to pin-point the resemblances of ideas between Emerson’s *Nature* and the *Gita* in brief. Emerson says: “I am nothing, I see all; the currents of the Universal Being, circulate through me, I am part or particle of God” (*W*, I, 10). This idea is very pronounced.
in the *Gita*. We needn't illustrate it here. Next, the theory of action in the *Gita* is reflected when Emerson says: “A man is fed not that he may be fed, but that he may work” (W, I, 14). Next, in Emerson and in the *Gita* man is linked to the uses of nature through his senses. Exploring uses of nature Emerson says “Commodity” in nature means “advantages which our senses owe to nature.” This benefit is “temporary and mediate, not ultimate” (W, I, 12). The life of senses, in Emerson and in the *Gita*, has to be transcended. Emerson explains further: “Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of men as meekly as the ass on which the saviour rode” (W, I, 40). The three qualities of nature in the *Gita* serve the same purpose for man. They serve man readily but they create an illusion which needs to be overpowered. Their benefit is, to use Emerson's words, ‘temporary and mediate.’ In that respect nature is unreal. In the ultimate analysis, because the Self is in everything, in Emerson and in the *Gita*, there is unity in diversity. And Emerson says: Nature has unity, “the unity in variety” (W, I, 43). The “senses” believe in “the absolute existence of nature.” This is “despotism of the senses, which binds us to nature as if we were part of it.” This compares well with the overpowering influence of the three qualities of nature on man.

Emerson points to the enlightenment (in the *Gita* it occurs when one rises above the influence of three qualities of nature and becomes trigunatita, one with the Self): Thought “shows us nature aloof, and as if it were afloat” (W, I, 49). And further: “The best moments of the life are these delicious awakenings of higher powers and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God” (W, I, 50). This compares well with the following lines in the *Gita*: “When he who beholdeth perceiveth no other agent than these qualities of nature and discovereth that there is a being superior to them, he at length findeth my nature.”
And “when the soul hath surpassed these three qualities which are co­existent with the body, it is delivered” (C. W. 109, XIV, 19, 20). It unites with the Self on the withdrawal of the nature from it.

Still, there is more to compare. Man, Emerson says, is “entitled to the world by his constitution” (W, I, 20). We already know that the Gita stresses this point. Then, the Self is for all, for everyone. It is “not mine or thine, or his, but we are its. We are its property and men” (W, I, 27). Everyone belongs to the Self. The Gita stresses this point. The desire for personal gain is condemned in the Gita and it is stressed that it blocks the individual's access to the Self. And Emerson says that the “simplicity of character and sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise” (W, I, 30).

Then, there is a reference to Viasa (W, I, 58) who is acknowledged as a philosopher with Berkeley. The Brahmins are included in the class of “every fine genius” “since the world began” (W, I, 34). Next, the soul, the part of Self in man, “is not hot or passionate at the appearance of what it calls its own good or bad fortune, at the union or opposition of other persons. It has no enemy. It accepts whatever befalls, as part of its lesson. It is a watcher more than a doer, and it is a doer, only that it may the better watch” (W, I, 60). This seems to be a commentary on the philosophy of the Gita. This also compares well with the Gita's idea of “the great God, the most high spirit, who is this body in the observer, the director, the protector, the partaker” (C.W. 104, XIII, 22).

Even a biographical search into Emerson's life reveals that, perhaps, the Gita influenced him very powerfully. As noted in the first chapter, in May 1831 Emerson came to be acquainted with philosophy of the Gita (as presented by Victor Cousin). He was highly impressed by it. It may be that it, perhaps, supported him in his decision to resign.
his pastorate in 1832. It is also possible that when he proceeded on a European voyage on Dec. 25, 1832 and also visited England, he got a copy of Charles Wilkins’ translation of *Gita* which had been in those days in the book market in that country since 1785. For a person like Emerson it looks simply unbelievable that on his tour to England he would not look for a translation of the *Gita* (keeping in mind the fact that he had even a French version of Victor Cousin's work on the *Gita* before leaving on his tour, in addition to its English translation by Henry Gottfried Linberg). Still, it is, however, intriguing why Emerson in a letter written to Miss Elizabeth Hoar in 1843 “states that ‘The only other event is the arrival in Concord of the Bhagavat *Gita*, the much renowned book of Buddhism [!], extracts from which I have often admired, but never before held the book in my hands.’”24 We can leave this point for future researches. Experts in stylistic linguistics, too, can analyse Emerson's texts and compare them with Charles Wilkin's translation of the *Gita* to solve this riddle.

Future researches on Emerson may also concentrate on the change of thought in Emerson's writings in his journals, etc. after May 1831, the time when Emerson first became acquainted with the *Gita*. One pointer to this need comes from one of Emerson's journals in which in 1826 he tells us that he doubts even the existence of God and has got serious reservations about what is preached in churches: “But now it must be admitted I am not certain that any of these things are true. The nature of God may be different from what he is represented. I never beheld him. I do not know that he exists.”25 Now, what gave Emerson the philosophy of the Self in 1836 in *Nature* needs to be explored. What caused the sea-change that is visible in the writings that followed?

It seems we cannot say that it was Plato's influence, though it had its role. According to Christy, “Emerson was definite in his
conviction that the basis of Plato's thought was Oriental. Emerson himself remarks about Plato that "he has not a system. The dearest defenders and disciples are at fault. He attempted a theory of the universe and his theory is not complete or self-evident." He adds: "One man thinks he means this, and another that; he has said one thing in one place, and the reverse of it in another place" (W, IV, 76).

It seems that the study of the Gita revolutionized Emerson's thought in the presence of other influences on him. Charles Malloy whom Emerson lent his copy of the Gita (translated by Charles Wilkins) tells us that Emerson told him: "I am a great borrower. I read all sorts of books, and take what belongs to me." Emerson, perhaps, took what he thought was the best in the Gita (and left out the rest). However, Sharpe is of the view: "However much Emerson may have admired the Gita, he absorbed no more than its general atmosphere. His philosophy had been formed before he had read it." "He accepted it as a valuable confirmation of what he had already come to believe about the innermost essence of the universe". About the Over-Soul Sharpe says: "And where better to perceive it than in the pages of the Gita?" Partap Chander Mazoomdar remarks about Emerson: "He seems to some of us to have been a geographical mistake. He ought to have been born in India." According to F.I. Carpenter, he "is probably the founder of the modern school of Comparative Religion, in America." A professor of Comparative Religion in a Western University, a Canadian by birth, when asked about his attitude to Emerson said: "Well, I named my first son after him."

Taking stock of the impact of the Gita on Emerson, it may also be noted that his poem "Brahma," too, is remarkable for its affinity with the Gita. It was published in the first number of the Atlantic Monthly in 1857. "To the reader of the Bhagavat Gita 'Brahma' seemed
a wholly admirable epitome or condensed statement, of that wonderful
book.”32 It is possible to “illustrate each stanza by parallel passages
from the Indian episode.”33 According to Malloy, “The Bhagavat Gita
is condensed into the poem ‘Brahma’.”34 In the style of the Gita's
Krishna Emerson makes his Brahma speak out: “I am the doubter and
the doubt, /And I the hymn the Brahmin sings and one to me are shame
and fame” (W, IX, 195).

It seems Walt Whitman, too, was influenced by the Gita and he
even began to speak like Krishna himself. “Emerson noted that
Whitman's reiterated I was much like the communal ‘I’ of Krishna.”35
Perhaps “much of his Oriental tinge may be attributed to the influence
of Emerson.”36 Incidentally, the influence of the Transcendental
Movement of which Emerson was the founder and chief spokesman
(and who in turn had been influenced by the Gita) has been far reaching
and has extended beyond his times. The movement was not only “an
important factor in American life, but it set the tone intellectual moral,
spiritual— for an entire generation of Americans.” Its “impact, although
inestimable, can be felt even to the present day.”37

Emerson and the Gita, beyond the resemblances of thinking
between them about human limitations and strengths, have a message
for mankind. It is that human life no doubt has its difficulties, but in
man lies the power of the creator to deal with them. Man is eternally
potent to deal with his circumstances, and can go on advancing infinitely
into the direction of improvement and perfection. The Self in the
universe is disguised in man. There is guidance and liberation from
troubles for everyone who opts for it. In “Fate” Emerson says: “A
breath of will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the
direction of the Right and Necessary.” Only the individual effort
matters: “Always one man more than another represents the will of the
Divine Providence to the period “ (W, VI, 28). On parallel lines the Gita says: “Eeshwar resideth in the breast of every mortal being, revolving with his supernatural power all things.” The choice for the individual is: “Take sanctuary then, upon all occasions with him alone” (C.W. 133, XVIII, 61, 62). In the Self lies the key to success, happiness and a solution to all our problems.
NOTES

1. Christy 121.

2. Christy 121.

3. Christy 119.

4. Christy 121.


6. Emerson 165.


9. Boller, Jr. 34.


13. Snider 152.
15. Higginson 3, 4.
16. Boller, Jr. 34.
17. Boller, Jr. 34.
18. Boller, Jr. 1.
1976, on page 8.


33. W.T. Harris 373.

34. Malloy 62.


37. Koster 1.