CHAPTER 6

THE SANYASIN OF AMERICA

Whitman's relations with the Bhagavad-Gita are enigmatic, in that he showed a surprising reticence about the book, the indelible impression of which has been noted on his masterpiece 'Leaves of Grass', ever since its appearance in 1855. Emerson, his most perceptive critic, who greeted this "most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom" as the work of incomparable things, said incomparably well, observed that "Leaves of Grass" were a mixture of the Bhagavad-Gita and the New York Herald and that Whitman's 'I' and the "communal I" of Krishna were close kins. Thoreau found him "wonderfully like the Orientals." However, these provocative remarks could not induce their contemporary criticism to appreciate the Oriental aspect of Whitman's thought and to apply it to unlock the chest of his mystical utterances, sounding "the barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world", forming the chief claim to his greatness. Only a few critics, such as Moncure Conway, showed some awareness of the presence of Oriental or for that matter Indian ideas in Whitman. It was only in 1897 that William Norman Guthrie emphasized the key role of the Gita for the correct understanding of the poet:

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2. Quoted in MERCER, p. 21.
3. MAYO, p. 168.
4. Quoted in MERCER, p. 22.
5. COULEY, Song of Myself, Section 52, p. 85.
"...yet inspite of every effort to be clear, he is steadily misunderstood by most readers for years unless they have chanced to study the idealistic philosophy of German, the mystics of Christian centuries, the neoplatonists, or better yet, for interpreting Emerson and Whitman, The Bhagavad Gita."

Following him, in 1906, Bliss Perry also noted the resemblance between "Whitman's well known communal "I" and "that of Krishna in the ninth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita." Writing in 1906, Edward Carpenter devoted a small appendix to listing a few parallel passages from the Gita, Upanishads and Leaves of Grass. In 1933, Dorothy F. Mercer in her doctoral dissertation 'Leaves of Grass and the Bhagavad-Gita: A Comparative Study', made a searching enquiry into the relations of the two master-pieces. In 1856 writing about "Song of Myself", Couley suggested that it was better understood, when considered in relation to the great mystical writings of the West and even more profitably, in relation to the mystical philosophies of India as expounded in the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Upanishads. Later on V.K. Chari concluded that the mystical verses of the 'Leaves' could be compared to the apocalyptic utterances of the Upanishads and the Gita. Prof. S.K. Kumar heard in Song of Myself a peculiar resonance from the Gita. Furthermore in his brilliant article on 'Song/Myself', Prof. Pandeya argued that the teachings of the Gita served as the "informing principle" of the poem. He also argued that Whitman's notions of Brahman, the two

1. Quoted in MERCER, p. 21.
3. COULEY, pp. XI & XII.
"opposite-equals", 'I', 'Me', 'Myself', Time, Place, Karma, Maya, Transmigration, Immortality, Good, Evil, etc. could be interpreted in the light of the Gita. His belief in the insufficiency of reason to know the truth, the indispensibility of intuition, the oneness of all things, his attainment of cosmic consciousness, the procreative urge, his characteristic spirit of detachment and his 'all-feeling' and sympathy could be directly linked with the Gita. Other scholars like T.R. Rajasekharaiah, Rayapati J.P. Rao and Walter K. Malone also underscored the influence of Krishna's lectures on Whitman's works and ideas.

But curiously enough, most of these explorers, although fully convinced of the manifold similarities found in the two books, did not make sure of the ground on which they stood, in that they did not try to solve the question of Whitman's reading the Gita during his gestation years. On the contrary, they rather mystified the question by suggesting that Whitman had not read the Gitas, before publishing the first edition of the Leaves. They attributed such "superficial" similarities as obtained "between his gospel and Indian teaching" to the vagaries of "chance" or relegated them "to the mysteries of the collective consciousness." Their conviction that Whitman did not read the Gita, during the formative days of his thought, had its source perhaps in Whitman's much publicized equivocal denial to Thoreau, who after his first meeting with

2. COWLEY, p. XII.
Whitman on November 9, 1856, wrote to Harrison Blake on December 7, 1856 about the episode:—

"Wonderfully like the Orientals, too, considering that, when I asked him if he had read them, he answered, "No: tell me about them."

Astonishingly, the words, which were intended to coax Thoreau to open the chest of his vast knowledge of the Orientals, were misconstrued to imply Whitman's genuine denial. "One cannot", as Melena feels, "help but sense that Whitman was not being quite truthful." Moreover Whitman's denial is quite inconsistent with his later acknowledgement of having read "the ancient Hindoo poems" in preparation to his Leaves of Grass. This misconception is also fortified by the fact that "there is not one single reference direct or implied, in all voluminous pages of Whitman's "prose, poetry or private record or in his conversation." Anyway this fact should not detain us, in view of Whitman's avowal of not to use quotations and his studied reluctance to disclose his sources.

A worse confusion has been created by Whitman's personal copy of the Gita, which now exists in Feinberg Collection. This copy of J. Cockburn Thomson's translation of the Gita was presented to him by Thomas Dixon, his English cork-cutter friend from Sunderland, as a Christmas gift in 1875. The fact that Whitman annotated the book

2. RAJAPATI, p. 292.
and made it his life-long companion, always carrying on with him, speaks volumes of his fascination for and the value he attached to the book. But at the same time, the fact that the book became available to him only in 1875, also rules out the possibility, if any, of its casting a formative influence on Whitman's ideas, which had taken their final shape by 1855, i.e. twenty years before the book became available to him.

Critics, who do not desire to leave the presence of the Gita-ideas in 'Leaves of Grass' to the vagaries of chance or at the mercy of the 'racial unconscious', argue that Whitman received them either from Emerson or from European sources or from both. They held that Transcendentalism was in the literary atmosphere of the day and that Whitman unconsciously absorbed from it, the mystic-ideas. This unconscious imbibing is what Malora calls the "literary osmosis."\(^1\)

To quote Dr. Mercer:--

"It was in this atmosphere, impregnated with interest in Hindu philosophy, literature, and religion that Whitman reached manhood."\(^2\)

Dr. Mercer seems to imply that Whitman's contact with the Vedas and the Gita was indirect and unconscious. Continuing the argument, Cowley has suggested:--

"It is true that they (Vedantic ideas) were vaguely in the air of the time and that Whitman may have breathed them in from the Transcendentalists or even from some of the English quarterly reviewers."\(^3\)

1. RAYAPATI, p. 292.
2. MERCER, p. 18.
3. COWLEY, p. XII.
Albeit Couley is convinced that Whitman's ideas were "not of literary derivation."\(^1\) As for the "affinity between the poet's writings and the mysticism of the Orient", Malone holds that Whitman's "experience of cosmic consciousness" is responsible.\(^2\) But there are also scholars, who firmly believe that Whitman came in direct touch with Indian thought by reading, the translations of the Oriental scriptures. Bliss Perry holds that Whitman:

"read Hindu and Persian poets in the best translations available, carried Alger's Oriental Poetry to the Washington Hospitals to read to wounded soldiers and made notes, it is said, in his own copy of the Bhagavad-Gita."\(^3\)

But let us remember that indirect reading, or partial reading, although capable of making inroads into mind, does not bring great changes. The question of Whitman's reading should be viewed in the context of the sudden explosion of his creative powers. The suggestion that the "enormous amount of industry that Whitman put into the making of his poetry in those long years of preparation"\(^4\) is untenable; for industry or diligence or perspiration can make one a prolific writer but, it cannot bring a complete change or cause a "remarkable accession of power."\(^5\) Only the power of inspiration can turn a mediocre into a Valmiki or a Kalidas or a Tulsidas. There is always enlightenment behind transformation, and not sex experience, which besides being blinding, is invariably subject to

\(^1\) COULEY, p. XII.
\(^2\) Quoted in RAYAPATI, p. 293.
\(^3\) Quoted in RAYAPATI, p. 291.
\(^4\) RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 25.
'Law of Diminishing Returns'. There is evidence to suggest that there was, "an extra-ordinary experience", in Whitman's life "which he never afterwards forget, and which revised all his speech, and moulded all his forms of thought."\(^1\) Dr. Bucke describes this experience of Whitman in 'Portraits of Walt Whitman', in the following words:—

"He tells us of a marvellous rebirth, which happened to him in June, 1853, in the beginning of his thirty-fifth year."\(^2\)

"He tells us that illumination came in June — the usual time of the year; that after it came his life was absolutely controlled by it — it "held his feet." He tells of the peace, joy, and knowledge (the moral exaltation and intellectual illumination which belongs to the new birth), passing all the art and argument of the earth, that came to him. He saw the Cosmic order — the "Brahmanic Splendour" — and that the basic facts of the universe and of the human soul are love and immortality."\(^3\)

Malcolm Couley believes that Whitman had undergone this experience repeatedly. During this experience, which he (Couley) calls 'Samadhi', Whitman recreated his outlook. Describing this recreated outlook, Dr. Bucke notes:—

"He realizes how his other new self came to him and took possession of him, and how there swiftly arose and spread around him the peace and joy and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth, and how it came to him that all men ever born were his brothers and the women his sisters and lovers, and how he saw that the basic fact of creation (its "keelson") is love."\(^4\)

Prof. D.K. Nambiar guesses that this transformation came "presumably when he was twenty-nine years old....that he had the strange

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1. Emerson's words, quoted in YU, p. 33, borrowed.
2. Quoted in RAYAPATI, p. 293.
3. Ibid., p. 293.
4. Ibid., pp. 293-294.
mystical experience which he has described in half veiled language in the fifth sequence of the Song of Myself...Whitman looked upon it as the main urge and inspiration of Leaves.  

This mystic experience opened the flood-gates of his mind and released colossal mental, moral and spiritual energy to transform Whitman's creative life. Some critics are led to believe that Emerson, "his master" was the catalyst behind the transformation, as he brought his "simmering" self to a "boiling" point:

"I was simmering, simmering, simmering, Emerson brought me to a boil."

But Emerson was not big enough to claim the entire credit, for there was a world of difference between them. Comparing the two W.S. Kennedy proudly observed, that Whitman "sweeps an orbit vaster than (Emerson's) own and has in every respect a broader and more massive nature."\(^3\) In the realm of thought Emerson's vision is not so pervasive. He, to quote Couley, "had nothing to do with notions like metapsychosis, or Karma or the universe, pictured as a road for travelling souls."\(^4\) Their notion of identity too differed. The actual catalyst of this experience and subsequent transformation was a book i.e. the Bhagavad-Gita, the same book which had earlier transformed the life and thought of Emerson, Thoreau and many others; In the following pages an attempt will be made to establish that Whitman read the liberating lectures of Krishna during his gestation years, by examining the external and internal evidence.

1. G.K. Nambiar, Walt Whitman and Yoga, Jeevan Publications, 1966, p. 34; hereafter referred to as NAMBIAR.
2. Quoted in CHARI, p. 64.
4. COWLEY, p. XXVI.
The question of Whitman's reading the Gita prior to 1855 has been thoroughly probed by T.R. Rajasekharaiah, perhaps the most daring scholar of Whitman. He has given convincing arguments to prove that the American poet had read and used not only Cockburn Thomson's translation, prior to receiving his gift-copy, but also Wilkin's translation. He points out that Whitman's reading of Thomson's translation is confirmed by the following lines of his poem 'How Solemn as They One by One' (1865):

"I see behind each mask that wonder a kindred soul,
0 the bullet could never kill what you really are,
              dear friend,
Nor the bayonet stab what you really are;"

These lines run closely parallel to the following lines of the Gita, both in thought and language:

"The weapon divideth it not, the fire burneth it not,
the water corrupted it not, the wind drieth it not away;
for it is indivisible, incommensurable, incorruptible, and it is not to be dried away; it is invisible, inconceivable, and unalterable."

The 1860 poem 'O Living Always: Always Dying' suspiciously resembles a footnote in Thomson's translation, explaining a saying of Krishna that was rendered differently by Wilkins. Furthermore in his Introduction Thomson notes that Krishna was raised to the status of Vishnu and was identified with the Supreme. Krishna was considered an 'avatar' and, interestingly Whitman considers himself as an avatar in 'So Long!'

"I feel like one who has done work for the day to
retire awhile,
I receive now again of my many translations, from
my 'avatars ascending, while others doubtless
await me.' 1

Even in the immense catalogue of things and ideas, described in
the poem "Apostrophe," published in 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass,
we can suspect the hand of the Gita. The incantation and frenzied
utterances of the poem, which are also taken up in another poem "O
Sun of Real Peace," recall to the reader's mind those of Arjuna's
in the Gita, to whom has been granted the vision of the Supreme
Spirit. 2 These facts clearly suggest Whitman's acquaintance with
the Gita prior to 1860.

Whitman's frequent use of phrases, spellings, arguments and
expressions in his 1855 edition, not only from Wilkins, but also
from Hastings, who wrote a marvellous introduction to Wilkins' translation, strengthens our supposition that Whitman perused the
Gita prior to 1855. Hastings' phrase "the Hindoo teaching his
favourite pupil", occurs in "Salut au Monde" in 1856 edition under
the title 'Poem of Salutation' :-

"I hear the Hindoo teaching his favourite pupil the
loves, wars," 3

Whitman's spelling of Vyasa, the compiler of the Mahabharat as
'Veias' in one of his fragments (Indian epic poetry - who was Veas?)
occurs in 'Hastings' introduction. Furthermore Whitman's admission
of obscurity and vagueness in his works is much in the fashion of

1. Collected Writings, p. 506.
2. RAJASEKHARAIAH, p. 376.
3. The Collected Writings, p. 139.
Hastings' allowance of obscurity in the concepts of the Gita, because of the abstract and unsubstantial nature of metaphysical subjects, which the Gita deals. Warren Hastings' interesting description of the physical and spiritual aspects of yoga, seems to stimulate Whitman's manuscript workings on the projected poem to be called "Penitenzie." Hastings notes that the Gita attempts to describe spiritual images by terms and images, which appertain to corporal forms. In order to describe subtle ideas, Hastings adds, the Gita opts for the frequent recurrence of the same sentiments in a variety of dresses. Whitman's use of physical and sexual imagery for the communication of the sublime spiritual ideas and his pronounced habit of repetition, in all probability, might have been influenced by the remarks of Warren Hastings.

Likewise Whitman also made a frequent and meaningful use of Wilkins's Preface to his translation. In the Preface, he notes that the Gita forms the part of the Mahabharat, "an ancient Hindoo poem" -  a phrase which Whitman adopted to describe his reading of Indian books in preparation to his "Leaves of Grass." In the same Preface Wilkins observes:

"It seems as if the principal design of these dialogues was to unite all the prevailing modes of worship of those days;"

Whitman's intention is precisely the same:--

1. See RAJASEKHARAIAN, p. 380.
2. WHITMAN, p. 401.
3. Quoted in RAJASEKHARAIAN, p. 382.
"My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, Enclosing all worship ancient and modern, and all between ancient and modern."  

This idea has been emphasized in Sections 41, 48 and 50 of 'Song of Myself.'  

In Section 50, Whitman offers "eternal happiness" to all, as Krishna does to his devotees. Krishna does not make a direct attack on the divine authority of the ancient scriptures, implying that he accepts them. Whitman too performs his teaching "not objecting to special revelations" (Sec. 41) and "accepting the Gospels."  

In the Preface Wilkins observes that despite their monistic beliefs, the most learned Brahmins of the present times perform Vedic rites with the sole aim of winning the support of the vulgar. In Section 40, Whitman too, does not despise priests, performs "all the ceremonies inculcated by the Vedas" or "gospels" of the world: "all the idolatrous sacrifices, and the worships of images", with all"the prejudices of the vulgar."  

These stylistic and thematic resemblances or rather similar rites establish without a shred of doubt that Whitman had gone through Hastings' Introduction and Wilkins' Preface very carefully. Whitman's acquaintance with the Gita can also be surmised from his remark against Eduard Carpenter's suggestion that the West has much to learn from India:  

"I do not myself think there is anything more to come from that source."  

1. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 43, p. 75.  
2. See RAJASEKHARAIAN, p. 383.  
3. Ibid., p. 383.  
4. Ibid., p. 384.  
5. Ibid., p. 373.
Whitman's remark implies that he had gleaned all that India had to offer. This impression is confirmed by Whitman's annotations on the Gita in his personal copy. Let us reproduce these notes and markings, as listed by George Hendrick:

P. (xxv). A perpendicular mark in the right margin marks lines 17-19; 'Greece' and 'India' are underscored on line 18. In line 23, 'Syria' is underscored and in the right margin there is a question mark. The markings concern materials on the *Origin of Philosophical Ideas in India*.

P. xxvi. A perpendicular mark in the left margin marks lines 2 and 3. 'The desire for knowledge' in line 2 is underscored. In line 15, Whitman placed a question mark in the left margin at the beginning of a discussion of India's 'Age of Barbarism'.

P. xxvii. Lines 1-32 are marked with a perpendicular mark in the right margin. The marked material is concerned with the beginnings of religion in a barbaric age.

P. xxxi. Lines 24-35 are marked with a perpendicular mark in the right margin. In line 26, 'the Aryan or Hindu' is underscored. In lines 31-32 'we must not of course consider them (the Aryans) as the aborigines of India' is underscored.

P. xxxii. A perpendicular mark in the left margin marks lines 1-5. In line 4 'perhaps a few generic names' is underscored. The passage deals with Aryan borrowings from the aborigines.

P. xxxiii. Two perpendicular lines in the right margin mark lines 7-22. Lines 7-10 are underscored: 'The thundercloud was personified in Indra, and as he was the most terrible and least comprehended, he soon became the chief of the deities.' In lines 16-19, a discussion of deification, the words 'Gandharvas, the musicians'; 'Apasaras, the beautiful nymphs'; 'Daityas, demons' and giants'; 'Rakshasas, evil spirits' are underscored.

P. xxiv. A perpendicular line in the left margin marks lines 20-22. Inserted into the Gita is a loose sheet; on the verso of a letter from Justin H. McCarthy, dated Saturday, 23 September 1976, Whitman wrote 'the *Mahabharata* immense old Hindu poem - war carried on between two branches of a family the Kurus (the elder) and the Pandus.
the (younger) for old Hastinapura (modern Delhi) -
this war fills 20,000 shlokas of the  didactic & legendary episodes interpolated since
weaved in by various redactors, successive editions, different times - the Gagavad-Gita is one of these episodes of
the M."

P. lxviii. Marking a passage on medical education is a
perpendicular mark in the left margin by lines 3-12. In
line 12 'Sutres, or "threads"' is underscored.

P. (cxxxii). In line 12 'Sutras or bands' is underscored;
in lines 15-16 'the very fact of their being also chario-
teers' is underscored, and in the left margin Whitman
wrote, 'the Hindu Sutras i.e. charioteers & poets.'

P. cxxxiii. Whitman wrote at the bottom of the page,
'the Vyasa i.e. the compiler or arranger particularly
Dusispayana the latest and principal compiler of the Vedas.
Also the Mahabharata the Puranas, etc.'

P. cxxxiv. Lines 4-13, 19-28, 29-32 are marked by per-
pendicular lines in the left margin, and lines 19-27 are
marked by double lines in the left margin. A perpendicular
mark in the right margin marks lines 19-28. In lines 19-20
'portraiture of character in the personages' is underscored.

P. cxxxv. A perpendicular mark in the right margin marks
lines 1-10. In lines 1-3 'the great epic of India, which,
from its popularity and extent, would seem to correspond
with the Iliad among the Greeks' is underscored.

P. cxxxvi. Perpendicular line in the left margin marks
lines 22-24. In line 23 'Arya or the Noble' is underscored.

P. cxxxvii. At the top of the page Whitman wrote the
descriptive note 'plot of the Mahabharata.'

P. cxxxviii. Lines 1-36 are marked with a perpendicular
line in the left margin; a second, heavier perpendicular
mark in the left margin marks lines 11-14 'was now acting
the part of a charioteer to him' is underscored. The
discussion concerns Krishna.

P. 145. A perpendicular mark in the right margin marks
lines 12-16. In line 15 'Vamiki's beautiful epic, the
Ramayana' is underscored.

P. 149. In a discussion of Veda, lines 40-42 are marked
by a perpendicular line in the right margin.
P. 150. In a continuing discussion of the Veda, a perpendicular line in the left margin marks lines 5-7. In lines 41-42, 'there are, undoubtedly, many points or resemblance between Krishna and our Saviour' is underscored.1

The portions, which caught Whitman's attention, were concerned with the topics such as the Origin of Philosophical Ideas of India; the desire for knowledge; the Age of Barbarism; the beginning of religion in a barbaric age; the Aryans or Hindu; the Aryan borrowing from the aborigines; Indra and his Thunderbolt; the Gandharvas, Apsaras, Daityas; Rakshas etc.; the Mahabharat, the Bhagavad-Gita being one of its episodes; the Vedic education; the Hindu Sutras; the Vyasa; the Indian and Greek epics; the meaning of Aryan; the plot of the Mahabharat; Krishna; the Ramayana; the resemblance between Krishna and the Saviour, etc.2

Whitman's markings are, of course, very interesting. But considering the length of the book and its Introduction and considering too, Whitman's philosophical interests, these notes are surprisingly meagre and curiously on comparatively insignificant topics. These notes disclose very little of these subjects viz. the Self, Brahman, Karman, Transmigration, Yoga etc., which were common to Whitman and the Gita. Of the fact that Whitman chose to mark the topics of casual interest, there can be only one legitimate explanation namely that Whitman by that time knew the important doctrines of the Gita. All the more there are certain facts, which led some scholars to the supposition that Whitman had another copy

1: HENDRICK, pp. 13-14.
2: See the underlined portions of the list.
of the Gita. Elsa Baker in her article 'What Whitman Learned from the East'\(^1\) says that Whitman's copy of the Gita has marginal notes, whereas Dr. Mercer, quoting from Mrs. Traubel's letter to her, says that the copy in Mrs. Traubel's possession does not have the notes.\(^2\) Mrs. Traubel's copy with notes is now in Feinberg Collection,\(^3\) whereas the whereabouts of the copy without notes, if any, is not known. The above mentioned facts underscore a strong possibility of Whitman's reading the Gita during his formative years. It is probable that the works of Emerson and Thoreau created in him, a fascination for the doctrines of the Gita, which was available to him both in the New York Society Library and in the Astor Library, the places which were frequented by Whitman.

However the conclusive evidence for the fact that Whitman had read the Gita prior to 1855 and used it extensively in framing his concepts, comes from the text of his poems chiefly from 'Song of Myself' (1855) 'Salut au Monde' (1856), 'Song of the Open Road' (1856) and 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' (1856). 'Song of Myself,' "Whitman's highest poetic achievement and his most completely realized work" as well as "his most significant contribution to world literature,"\(^4\) gets the lions share of his gains from the Gita. T.R. Rajasekharaih believes that "in the making of his poems, especially 'Song of Myself', the part played by the "Song of Krishna" cannot be ignored."\(^5\) It

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1. RAJASEKHALAIH, p. 489 (notes).
2. MERCER, p. 24 (footnotes).
3. HENDRICK, p. 13 (footnotes).
5. RAJASEKHALAIH, p. 385.
fed "more grist to his verbal mill." It served as a model for his 'Song', for its title (the meaning of 'Song of Myself' being the same as that of the 'Song of Bhagavad' (God)) and the theme. Krishna's profound teachings formed the basis of the flight of Whitman's fancy. Prof. S.M. Pandeya finds that 'Song of Myself' and Whitman's 1855 Preface are full of strong evidences of the influence of the philosophy of the Gita as the "informing principle."

Rajasekharaiah, discovers unmistakable impressions of words, phrases, metaphors, concepts, mannerism and stylistic devices of the Gita in the poetry of Walt Whitman. "The major processes through which he has rendered the contents of the Gita fit for his song are those of verbal alteration, fanciful development, or a philosophically reckless metamorphosis..." He gives an elaborate chapterwise analysis of how Whitman used the Gita in his poems, especially in those poems, which contain his seminal ideas.

Whitman's actual interest in the Gita begins with the second lecture. Krishna's exhortion to the faint-hearted and unmanly Arjuna to be brave finds its reverberation in Whitman's resolution to blow grit within "those who are impatient, loose in the knees" figuring in Whitman's 1847 manuscript workings on the subject of "strength". It was later put in Section 40 of "Song of Myself." Thematically the second lecture deals with the nature of the Soul, immortality and the contrasting notions of the worldly people and

1. RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 385.
2. PANDEYA, p. 4.
3. RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 392.
5. COMLEY, Song of Myself (Section 40), p. 70.
men of wisdom — the themes, which Whitman takes up in Sections six, seven and two of 'Song of Myself', respectively. Krishna asserts that "this spirit" is "ancient, constant and eternal", that "infancy, youth and old age" belong to the body and that "heat and cold, pleasure and pain; which come and go, are transient and inconstant."1 On his part Whitman says that "there is really no death"2 that he "is not contained" between his "hat and boots"3 and that the "sickness", "..." or depressions or exaltations" come and go like "days and nights"4 Krishna's saying that death is "certain to all things, which are subject to birth and regeneration to all things, which are mortal"5; finds an echo in Whitman's poem 'To One shortly to Die', declaring that there is no escape from death. In this poem he also tells us that the destination of a dying man, although "real and perfect" is unknown, much in the same way as Krishna asserts that "the former state of beings is unknown; the middle state is evident, and their future state is not to be discovered."6

Krishna's assurance that "the weapon divideth not the soul has been paralleled by Whitman's assertion, that "the bullet could never kill ... Nor the bayonet stab"9 the soul, in another poem i.e.

1. B.G. (U), II, 13-14, Wilkins's translation as quoted in RAJASEKHARIAH, p. 393; hereafter referred to as B.G. (U).
2. COYLEY, Song of Myself, Section 6, p. 30.
3. COYLEY, Song of Myself, Section 7, p. 31.
4. COYLEY, Song of Myself, Section 4, p. 20.
5. B.G. (U), II, 27, quoted in RAJASEKHARIAH, p. 393.
8. Ibid., II, 23, quoted in RAJASEKHARIAH, p. 393.
How Solemn as They One by One (1865). Whitman by rising above the duality of victory and defeat and by playing "march" not only for "victors" but also for the "conquered and slain persons,"¹ (Sec. 18) seems to follow Krishna's advice to Arjuna to make "pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same,..."²

Krishna's disparagement of Vedas and men of learning is echoed in Whitman's mocking at the pride of those who have practiced so long to learn to read."³ Whitman also imitates Krishna's advice to Arjuna to "seek an asylum then in wisdom alone", as he asks his readers to "stop" with him to "possess the origin of all poems."⁴ Krishna's man of wisdom or 'sthitaprajna' rises above the duality of good and evil, as he neither "rejoiceth" at the good nor is "cast down" by evil⁵; remains "contented in himself"⁶ and receives wisdom flowing "from all sides." Whitman eulogizes both goodness and wickedness, as he is the poet of both.⁷ He does not "blurt" about "virtue" and "vice", but stands "indifferent" and without least care for the world, sits "content."⁸ He too, like the 'sthitaprajna' of the Gita "shall listen to all sides and filter them from (his) self."⁹

Krishna's anatomy of 'passion', undoubtedly makes a profound impact on that of Whitman's analysis. Krishna says :-

¹. COYLE, Song of Myself, Section 18, p. 42.
². B.G. (U), II, 38, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 394.
⁵. B.G. (U), II, 57, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 395.
⁷. COYLE, Song of Myself, Section 22, p. 46.
⁸. Ibid., Section 19, 44.
"The man who attendeth to inclinations of the senses, in them Hath a concern; from this concern is produced passion, from passion anger, from anger is produced folly, from folly a deprivation of the memory, from the loss of memory the loss of reason, and from the loss of reason the loss of all."\(^1\)

In Section 28 of the 'Song' Whitman uses nearly the same phraseology to describe the condition of the man, betrayed by his "tumultuous senses":

"Flames and ether" make "a rush for (his veins).... the tumultuous senses.... stiffen his limbs, and strain the udders of his heart.... depriving (him) of (his) beat, as for a purpose." From this "concern", his "touch", passion is created in his "flesh and blood", and this passion ends in "confusion" and has "no regard for (his) draining strength or (his) anger." Ultimately there is the "loss of memory" and the "loss of reason: for he talk(s) wildly" and has "lost (his) wits"; and then follows even "the loss of all."\(^2\)

Krishna's description of the man of wisdom as a "tortoise" with "all his members" drawn\(^3\) has been adopted by Whitman to describe a quahog in its callous shell and in the "callous shell" of his "divine form."\(^4\) If the Gita says such a man is self-delighted\(^5\), Whitman says:

"I dote on myself....there is that lot of me, and all so luscious."\(^6\)

Whitman does not show much interest in the Third Lecture of the Gita dealing with Karmayoga except for the verses, saying:

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2. RAJASEKHARAIAH, p. 396.
3. B.G. (U), II, 58, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIAH, p. 397.
4. COULEY, Song of Myself, Section 27, p. 53.
5. B.G., II, 55.
6. COULEY, Song of Myself, Section 24, p. 49.
"Those who dress their meat but for themselves, eat the bread of sin."1

This passage may have some connection with the following passage, which occurs in 'Notes and Fragments' :-

"Have you heard the gurgle of gluttons perfectly willing to stuff themselves. While they laugh at the good fun of the starvation of others."2

These lines remind us of Krishna's denunciation of "lust or passion", "the sinful destroyer of wisdom and knowledge."3

Whitman seems to take keen interest in the concept of 'avatars' and faith and its necessity for wisdom and 'yoga', which are the prominent themes of the fourth chapter of the Gita, dealing with the Way of Knowledge or Forsaking of Works. Krishna assumes human form "from age to age" to rescue the suffering humanity.4 Whitman also assures his readers that he comes "again and again" to help people in need. Highlighting the importance of faith, Krishna makes it abundantly clear that man of faith "findeth wisdom...and enjoyeth superior happiness", whereas the man of doubting nature "is lost", finding peace neither (in) this world nor (in) that which is above.5 In Section 43, announcing his faith as the greatest of faiths, Whitman sees doubting minds, suffering from doubt despair and unbelief.6 Furthermore Krishna says :-

1. E.G. (U), III, 13, quoted in RAJASEKHARAI SHALL, p. 408.
2. Quoted in RAJASEKHARAI SHALL, p. 408.
4. E.G. (U), IV, 8, quoted in RAJASEKHARAI SHALL, p. 397.
6. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 43, pp. 75-76.
"Wisdom (which he who is perfected by practice, in due time findeth...in his own soul) shineth forth with the glory of the sun."1

Whitman also uses this image in Section 25:—

"We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun, We found our own my soul in the calm and cool of the daybreak."2

For finding wisdom the Gita lays great emphasis on the need of for contemplation:—

"The man, who is incapable of thinking, hath no rest. What happiness can be enjoy, who hath no rest?"3

For wisdom or the power of contemplation is what gives "happiness supreme."4 Whitman is also equally emphatic on the need for contemplation:—

"As to you, if you have not learned to think, enter upon it now, Think at once with directness, breadth, aim, conscientiousness, You will find a strange pleasure from the start and grow rapidly each successive week."5

In his fifth 'lecture' entitled 'True Renunciation' Krishna describes the human body as "the nine-gate city" of the soul's "abode."6 Whitman adopts this metaphor in the Song of the Open Road (Section 7).

"The efflux of the soul comes from within through embowed gates..."7

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1. B.G. (V), IV, 38, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 398.
2. COYLEY, Song of Myself, Section 25, p. 59.
3. B.G. (V), IV, 40, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 408.
4. B.G. (V), IV, 39, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 408.
5. Quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 408.
The sixth lecture of the Gita deals with "the Exercise of the Soul" or Yoga. Krishna's yogi 'sitteth' on "the sacred grass" for yoga-practices, for attaining the state of enlightenment. In section 5 of the 'Song' Whitman invites his soul to loafe with (him) on the grass. It is on the grass that he heard "the hum of (the soul's) valved voice" and had illumination. Likewise the "supreme Yogee" of the Gita, who beholdeth in others "what passeth in his own breast" can be likened with Whitman, who identifies himself with the sufferer to such an extent that he himself becomes "the wounded person."

The seventh lecture of the Gita, has its vibrations, mainly in the third section of the 'Song'. At the outset Krishna promises Arjuna to tell him the divine mystery. Whitman also offers to "tell the origin of all poems." If to Krishna nothing is superior to Him; to Whitman One's Self (which in Whitman is God) is the greatest of all. Krishna's simile:

"All things hang on me, even as precious gems upon a string."

has been adopted by Whitman in 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry':

"The similitudes of the past and those of the future, The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings,"

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1. B.G. (W), VI, 11, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 399.
2. COOLEY, Song of Myself, Section 5, p. 28.
3. B.G. (W), VI, 32, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 399.
4. COOLEY, Song of Myself, Section 33, p. 63.
5. B.G., VII, 2.
6. COOLEY, Song of Myself, Section 48, p. 82.
8. The Collected Writings, p. 160.
Whitman's kinship with Krishna is most striking in his use of the 'First Person Singular', a daring innovation, in the Western quarters, where such expressions, as Whitman uses, are considered blasphemous, whereas in India these expressions herald one's reaching the highest state of enlightenment. E. L. Mayo rightly believes that Whitman's "Indian reader is not so shocked as his American one,"\(^1\) for the Indian reader realizes that

"The inhabitant of the perishable body, the indestructible life-monad (purusa), which.....according to the composite system of the Bhagavad Gita is but a particle of the one supreme Divine Being, with which its essence is identical."\(^2\)

"The Western reader is "shocked" at Whitman's use of 'I', particularly when it means for him "the individualistic first personal pronoun."\(^3\)

However there are some notable differences between the utterances of Krishna and Whitman. Krishna, for instance, "identifies himself with the highest in the scale of life, thought and things"; whereas "Whitman steps down to become the average and the common."\(^4\) Furthermore Krishna, "filters the cosmic consciousness through an aristocratic sieve"\(^5\); whereas Whitman does it through an ordinary one.

Nevertheless their thematic and linguistic similarities are apparent, even at a cursory glance. Elsie Perry confirms that Whitman's well-known communal 'I' resembles that of Krishna in the ninth chapter of

\(^1\) Mayo, p. 170.
\(^2\) H. Zimmer, quoted in Mayo, p. 170.
\(^3\) Rayapati, p. 354.
\(^4\) Som P. Ranchan, Walt Whitman & The Great Adventure with Self, Manaktales, Bombay, 1967, p. 44; hereafter referred to as Ranchan.
\(^5\) Ranchan, p. 44.
the Bhagavad-Gita."\(^1\) For these utterances, Whitman's indebtedness to the Gita begins from the seventh chapter:—

**Krishna:** "I am sound in the firmament."\(^2\)

**Whitman:** "With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds."\(^3\)

**Krishna:** "This divine and supernatural power... is hard to overcome."\(^4\)

**Whitman:** "I... am, around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless... and can never be shaken away."\(^5\)

**Krishna:** "He who thinketh constantly of me... I will at all times be easily found by (him)."\(^6\)

**Whitman:** "The soldier camp'd or upon the march is mine, on the night are the pending battle many seek me and I do not fail them. On that solemn night (it may be their last) those that know me seek me."\(^7\)

Whitman adopts some of Krishna's utterance of the ninth chapter, notably the following:—

**Krishna:** "All things are dependent upon me, and I am not dependent on them."\(^8\)

**Whitman:** "I am free companion."\(^9\)

**Krishna:** "I bear the burthen of the devotion of those who are thus constantly engaged in my service."\(^10\)

**Whitman:** "If you tire give me both burdens."\(^11\)

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1. RAYAPATI, p. 355.
2. B.G. (W), VII, 8, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 400.
3. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 25, p. 50.
4. B.G. (W), VII, 14, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 400.
5. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 7, p. 31.
6. B.G. (W), VIII, 14, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 400.
7. The Collected Writings, p. 85.
9. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 33, p. 51.
11. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 46, p. 80.
Whitman goes to reproduce some of these "Brahmic utterances" incorporated in the tenth chapter also; the more important being the following:—

Krishna: "Of the race of Vreeshnae I am the son of Vasudeva." 6

Whitman: "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs Kosmīs" 2

Krishna: "I am also never failing time: the preserver.... I am all-grasping death; and I am the resurrection of those who are about to be" 3

Whitman: "Distant and dead resuscitate, They show as the dial or move as the hands of me..... and I am the clock myself." 4

Krishna: "Amongst the bards, I am the prophet Oosana." 5

Whitman: "Through me many long dumb voices, Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion, And of the threads that connect the stars...(are) clarified and transfigur'd." 7

Krishna: "I am the beginning, the middle, and the end,..... am the seed of all things in nature. 7

Whitman: "Through me the afflatus surging and surging...... through me the current and index." 8

These instances can be multiplied. However, it should be noted that neither Whitman adopts all of the utterances of Krishna, nor all of Whitman's utterances can be traced from the Gita.

1. B.G. (W), X, 37, quoted in RAJASEKHARAI, 405.
2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 24, p. 48.
4. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 33, p. 63.
5. B.G. (W), X, 37, quoted in RAJASEKHARAI, p. 405.
6. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 24, p. 48.
8. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 24, p. 48.
To resume our chapter-wise comparison for discovering influences, the contents of the eighth lecture, entitled the "Course of Cosmic Evolution" go into "Song of the Open Road." Krishna and Whitman both emphasize the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasures. Krishna tells Arjuna that "all regions between this (earth) and the abode of Brahma, afford but a transient residence."\(^1\) Whitman is also mindful that the "hospitality" of this world is but for "a little while."\(^2\) During the tenure of his life, according to Krishna, man carries the burden of his 'karma' and suffers the weight of the three qualities 'sattva' (goodness), 'rajas' (passion) and 'tamas' (dullness). Whitman is also conscious of his "old delicious burdens."\(^3\) In the Gita, the 'yogee' is required to have "all the doors of his faculties closed up"; "his mind" "locked up" "in his own breast"; "his spirit" "fixed"; "his mind undiverted by another object."\(^4\) Something of this devotion and discipline is envisaged by Whitman also, while proceeding along with his 'open-road' journey:

"Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me."\(^5\)

Whitman's journey is "beginningless" and "endless", and in it all things "tramps of days" and rests of night — merge and tend:

"Again to merge them in the start of superior journey."\(^6\)

\(^1\) B.G. (U), VIII, 16, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIAH, p. 401.
\(^2\) The Collected Writings, p. 154.
\(^3\) B.G., VII, 13.
\(^4\) The Collected Writings, p. 149.
\(^5\) B.G. (U), VIII, 12, quoted in RAJASEKHARAIAH, p. 403.
\(^6\) The Collected Writings, p. 151.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 156.
The theme and imagery of Whitman's description run close to Krishna's statement that how at the commencement of Brahma's day (being of the duration of thousand ages) all the manifold things come forth and at the coming of night (which too is of the same duration) they merge in the same called the unmanifested.\(^1\) Mercer thinks that Whitman had some notion of this "Kalpa" Theory.

It is evident from the following descriptions:

"Cyles ferried (his) cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatman"\(^2\)

But the devotee after attaining "Krishna's abode does not return."\(^3\) Much in the same fashion Whitman's travellers go "towards the best", presumably not to return. In the end, Krishna offers to his devotees, fruits, which are superior to those, yielded by the "meritorious deeds", the study of Vedas, sacrifices, austerities and gifts.\(^4\) Whitman also offers "rough new prizes", in place of "old" ones.\(^5\) Whitman insists upon going "well arm'd" on his road,\(^6\) but interestingly the arms, recommended are not ordinary arms, but the arms of contemplation, mooted by the Gita.

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2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 44, p. 78.
5. The Collected Writings, p. 155.
6. The Collected Writings, p. 158.
Whitman uses the contents of the Chapter IX, which discusses the Sovereign Mystery in Song of Myself. Krishna accepts love offered by a pure heart; Whitman also will "never of deny" his man, whether he be a "cotton-field" drudge or "emptier privies." He makes appointment with all and his "meal" is equally set for the wicked and the righteous alike. On his part Krishna makes no distinction between a man of vile conduct and that of righteous conduct. Krishna's devotee does not "perish," whereas with Whitman, even "the weakest and swallest is deathless." The comparison between Krishna's self-delineation with that of Whitman has been noted earlier. An important point of this chapter, referring to the common man's ignorance about God ---

"The deluded despise Me clad in human body, not knowing My higher nature as Lord of all existences." has been taken up in another poem 'Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me?' in the following words:--

"I am surely far different from what you suppose;" Elsewhere in a fragment, Whitman poses the same question again:--

"Did you think then you knew me?"

2. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 40, p. 70.
3. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 19, p. 42.
6. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 42, p. 74.
7. B.G., IX, 11.
8. The Collected Writings, p. 123.
Krishna's assertion in the tenth lecture that he is "the Lord of worlds"\(^1\) and "the friend of all" finds its equal in "The Sleepers" where Whitman calls himself the "boss" of nature and the "journeymen divine."\(^2\) Krishna's another utterance figuring in Chapter XI, that:—

"Time, am I; world destroying"\(^3\)

is echoed in Chanting the Square Deific

"I am Time, old, modern, as any, Unpersuadable, relentless..."\(^4\)

In this lecture Krishna shows his divine form. As Arjuna is not able to bear this cosmic vision, he asks Krishna to return to his human form—

"I have seen what was never seen before and I rejoice but my heart is shaken with fear. Show me that other (previous) form of Thine, O God and be gracious, O Lord of the gods and Refuge of the Universe."\(^5\)

Whitman expresses this kind of awe, after seeing the vision in O Son of Real Peace:—

'O heights too swift and dizzy yet!
O purged and luminous! you threaten me more than
I can stand!\(^6\)

Whitman also discusses several types of worshippers as Krishna does in lecture XII of the Gita. In lecture XIII, Krishna speaks about the presence of the Supreme Spirit (Purusa) as—

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1. B.G., X, 3.
2. The Collected Writings, p. 426.
4. The Collected Writings, p. 443.
5. B.G., XI, 45.
6. The Collected Writings, p. 603.
"the great God, the most high spirit, who in this body is the observer, the director, the protector, the partaker."1

Commenting on this passage T.R. Rajasekharaiah writes:—

"Whitman's "Song develops his self celebration in these directions: in section 8 and 10, he plays the "observer", "peeringly view(ing)" the "show", and seeing "the marriage of the trapper"; the "protector" in section 40, filling "every room of the house...with an arm'd force"; and the "partaker", in section 33, where he "take(s) part" in "the cries, curses, roar, the plaudits", and so on."2

in lecture XIV of the Gita Krishna's assumption of the role of the father who sows seeds in the womb of the "great Brahma"3 draws a similar response in Whitman —

"On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes."4

The role of the father, he continues to play in "Children of Adam." In the next chapter (XV) Krishna likens the world as the "imperishable asvathama" (peepal tree), having its roots above and branches below — the Vedas being its leaves.5 Whitman also equates himself with the live Oak growing in Louisiana", which could utter "joyous leaves."6 We should remember that Whitman often suggests the equation of his 'Leaves' to Vedas. In lecture XVI, Krishna refers to men of divine and demoniac natures.7 Likewise of "good doers" and

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3. B.G., XIV, 3.
4. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 40, p. 71.
5. B.G., XV, 1.
6. The Collected Writings, p. 126.
7. B.G., XVI, 6.
"murderers, drunkards and liars," Whitman also speaks in 'To Think of Time.' As the good man of the Gita is free from pride and ignorance, anger, desires and confusion, the ideal man of Whitman is also free from the 'knot of contrariety.' As for evil doers, Krishna hurl's them into the wombs of demons, whereas Whitman damn's them.

The terminal lecture of the Gita contains, Krishna's final advice to Arjuna:

"Fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me."

The poem "Starting from Paumanok" contains similar advice from Whitman:

"For your life adhere to me."

Krishna is willing to reveal the secret of divine mystery only to his friends:

'Listen again to My supreme word, the most secret of all well beloved art thou of Me, therefore I shall tell thee what is good for thee.'

Whitman shares this reservation of Krishna:

"This hour, I tell things in confidence, I might not tell everybody but I will tell you."

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1. The Collected Writings, p. 439.
2. B.G., XVI, 1–3.
3. Quoted in RAJASEKHARAI, p. 413.
4. B.G., XVI, 19.
5. RAJASEKHARAI, p. 413.
8. B.G., XVIII, 64.
9. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 19, p. 43.
As Krishna assures Arjuna to release him "from all evils," Whitman assures to protect them from doubt and disease:—

"Sleep! I and they keep guard all night:
No doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you."  

The devotees of Krishna never "perishes", whereas the lovers of Whitman turn into the "bafflers of graves." Krishna seeks a confirmation from Arjuna that he has heard him attentively:—

"O Partha (Arjuna) has this been heard by thee with thy thought fixed to one point? O winner of wealth (Arjuna) has thy distraction (of thought) caused by ignorance been dispelled?"

In an equally emphatic tone, Whitman poses the same question to his followers:—

"Have I refreshed and elevated you? 
Have you received from me new and valuable hints about your employment? 
Have you gone aside after listening to me and created yourself?"

These selected illustrations, which are by no means exhaustive, clearly establish that on many occasions, the thought and phraseology of Whitman run parallel to those of Krishna in the Gita. Apart from these linguistic (of course with the phrases of Wilkins's translation) and thematic resemblances, some of Whitman's artistic devices and metaphors bear an unmistakable impression of

1. B.G., XVIII, 66.
2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 40, p. 71.
4. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 40, p. 71.
5. B.G., XVIII, 72.
the Gita. He is indebted to this most influential Hindu book for his 'Brahmic utterances'; the concept of the Answerer; and the metaphors of the world as a road, and the river, as well as the sea, as symbols of mortal life. Whitman is also indebted to the Gita for certain stylistic innovations notably for the use of paradoxical method - a method in which ideas are presented in pairs of opposites. Whitman makes a wide and effective use of this style in 'Song of Myself', as noted by V.K. Chari:-

"The Song of Myself, makes the largest use of the paradoxical expression; there are about thirty seven paradoxical pairs in it on a rough count."1

Rajasekharaisah thinks that Whitman, however, did not invent it; he learned it from the characteristic style of Krishna. We can compare the following utterances:-

Krishna: I am the father of this world, the mother, the supporter and the grand sire.2

Whitman: I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others, Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man3

And am not the post of goodness only....I do not decline to be the post of wickedness also.4

According to Dr. Chari, "the whole of the 'Song of Myself' may be seen to be of the structure of a paradox - the paradox of Identity."5 Whitman seems to adopt another characteristic device of the Gita viz.

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1. CHARI, p. 46.
2. B.G., IX, 17.
3. COOLEY, Song of Myself, Section 16, p. 40.
4. Ibid., Section 22, p. 46.
crowding many nominatives together with the verb, that often comes, if it comes at all, at the end of the long list of cumulatively organized images. Whitman has made a conscious use of this style. Hendrick says that it is clear from one of his notes on the Gita. Whitman seems to adopt yet another device of the Gita. The Gita repeats ideas with expanded significance in new contexts. Much in the same way, according to Prof. Pandeyas, the movement of the "idea" of Song of Myself is also "repetitive and cyclic, gradually unfolding itself out into ever-expanding cycles." Moreover Krishna's practice of using concrete images for abstract thoughts and sexual imagery for spiritual truths is also evident in Whitman. These facts prove that Whitman read and used Wilkins' Gita, during his formative years.

The influence of the Gita is visible not only on Whitman's works, but also on his conceptual framework. Cowley's contention that Whitman's ideas are not of "literary derivation" is not maintainable in that there is strong evidence to prove that Whitman borrowed material to resurrect his philosophical base. Among his important sources Indian scriptures, especially the Gita held the pride of place. He was an idealist, but his idealism was not similar to that of Europe, which was of rationalistic brand, whereas, in the words of V.K. Chari:

"The type of idealism Whitman envisages is of a mystical, transcendental brand, in which "the religious tone, the consciousness of mystery, the recognition of

1. PANDEYA, p. 9.
2. COWLEY, p. XII.
the future, of the unknown, of Deity over and under all, and of the divine purpose, are never absent," of which the unknown spiritual world is an essential ingredient."1

Furthermore Whitman envisages the acquisition of true knowledge "not through the senses or the intellect, but through union with the Self"; the reading of "infinite lessons in common things" at such moments of union (or "merge", as Whitman preferred to call it); the availability of "this true knowledge" to every man and woman, each concealing a "divine self"; and the divinity of all implying "the perfect equality of all; the immortality of all, and the universal duty of loving one another."2 This type of mystical transcendental idealism tempered by a religious tone was available to Whitman only in Indian scriptures, especially in the Gita or in Transcendentalism of Emerson — a by-product of Indian mystical ideas.

The central point of Whitman's mystical idealism is the elevation of the Self to the highest point of religion and philosophy. In this context Whitman's Self runs closely parallel to that of the Gita. Krishna rends the clouds of Arjuna's ignorance by telling him that the Self is not coeval with the body. Consequently it is not subject to physical conditions, that is neither to childhood, youth and age, nor to "cold and heat; pleasure and pain."3 The Self is "unborn, eternal, permanent and primeval."4 Likewise Whitman's Self is also eternal:

1. CHARI, p. 141.
2. COWLEY, p. XXI.
"I, musing, late in the autumn day, gazing off southward, 
Alone, held by this eternal Self of me, out of the pride 
of which I utter my poems. 
As I walk'd with that eternal Self of me, seeking of 
types."

Whitman's Self, too, is not identical with the body. Hence it is 
also beyond death :

"And I know I am deathless, 
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's 
compass, 
I know I shall not pass like a child's carciac cut with 
a burnt stick at night."

Whitman firmly believes that for the Self, there is neither birth 
nor death :

"I pass death with the dying and the birth with the new 
born babes."

Regarding the indestructible nature of the Self, Krishna declares 
to Arjuna :

"Weapons do not cleave this self, fire does not burn him; 
Waters do not make him wet; nor does the wind make him 
dry."

Whitman also reproduces the same eloquent language to state cate-
gorically :

"O the bullet could never kill, what you really are, 
dear friend, 
Nor the bayonet stab what you really are;"

The immortality of the Self logically entails re-incarnation. As a 
firm believer in this doctrine Whitman declares :

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1. Quoted in MERCE, p. 41.
2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 20, pp. 43-44.
3. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 6, p. 30.
5. The Collected Writings, p. 322.
"...I shall come again upon the earth after five
thousand years."\(^1\)

Again:

"And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings
of many deaths
No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times
before."\(^2\)

These lines echo Krishna's famous assertion:

"Many are My lives that are past, and thine also,
O Arjuna; all of them I know but thou knowest
not...."\(^3\)

Krishna's view that the self cannot be comprehended by senses and
intellect in that it is "unmanifest" and "unthinkable"\(^4\) is also
shared by Whitman, as the following lines imply:

"Clear and sweet is my soul....and clear and sweet is
all that is not my soul.
Lack one lacks both...and the unseen is proved by the
seen,
Till that becomes unseen, and receives proof in its
turn."\(^5\)

The Self of the Gita defies common understanding:

"One looks upon Him as a marvel, another likewise speaks
of Him as a marvel; another hears of Him as a marvel;
and even after hearing no one whatsoever has known Him."\(^6\)

Whitman is also caught in the same predicament:

"I hear and behold God in every object, yet I understand
God not in the least."\(^7\)

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1. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 43, p. 75.
2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 49, p. 84.
5. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 3, p. 27.
7. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 48, p. 83.
Apart from sharing the above mentioned distinctive characteristics of the Vedantic Self, or for that matter the Self of the Gita, Whitman also adopts another Vedantic doctrine viz. the notion of doubleness. The Gita conceives of two selves, the lower and the Higher. The Lower Self is "buddhi" or the soul of western speculation, whereas the Higher Self is the real Self i.e. Atman. This Atman or the real Self lies deeper than the senses and intellect:

"The senses, they say, are great, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than the mind is the intelligence but greater than the intelligence is he."2

Emerson was one of those few Westerners who discovered that "the aboriginal abyss of real being" lies "under all this running sea of circumstance"3 and that the inner Self or the immortal essence exists "within this erring, passionate mortal self." Developing this idea even further, Whitman writes:

"....behind all faculties of the human being, as the sight, the other senses and even the emotions and the intellect stands the real power, the mystical identity the real I or Me or You."4

Of the two selves the Lower or the empirical self called 'Jiva' is the participant or the doer. It enjoys and suffers the fruits of his action. But the other Self is neither a participant nor a doer; he is merely a spectator ('sakain') and as such quite, unattached to the fruits of action as Krishna says:

1. ZACHNER, p. 22.
2. B.G., III, 42.
3. The Selected Writings, p. 185.
4. Quoted in CHARI, p. 75.
"Nor do these works bind Me... for I am seated as if indifferent, unattached in those actions." 1

"...this Supreme Self... (though) it dwells in the body, it neither acts, nor is tainted... the Self that is present in everybody does not suffer any taint." 2

Like his predecessors Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman, by his penetrative intuitive vision, discovers the presence of a true Witness-Self inside the spiritual centre within himself:

"Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it." 3

This Witness-Self has been termed as the "duplicate self" by Whitman:

"Another self, a duplicate of every one, skulking and hiding it goes,
Forswear and wordless through the streets of the cities, polite and bland in the parlors." 4

In another poem 'I sit and Look Out' repeating this idea, he writes:

"I sit and look upon all the sorrows of the world,
And upon all oppression and shame,
All these - all the meanness and agony without and
I sitting look out upon,
See, hear, and am silent." 5

Commenting upon the poem, T.R. Rajasekharaih asserts that the source of Whitman's inspiration was the Hindu notion of God as the universal witness, who seated internally beholds, the good and ill of all." 6

1. B.G., IX, 9.
3. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 4, p. 28.
4. The Collected Writings, p. 158.
5. Ibid., pp. 272-273.
6. Quoted in RAJASEKHARAIH, p. 335.
This belief in the two selves gave Emerson his famous doctrine of double-consciousness. Thoreau had a similar doctrine in his notion of "conscious doubleness." Like them Whitman was also conscious of "doubleness" inside him:

"I cannot understand the mystery, but I am always conscious of myself as two — as my soul and I; and I reckon it is the same with all men and women."1

Whitman's "Song of Myself" unfolds the deepest mystery of identity, the drama of the double self."2 It is interesting to note that the "central message of the Gita rests on man's double nature."3

Whitman, like Krishna, conceives of the Self in two forms, emanence and transcendence. As an immanent self it sits in the heart of all creatures. The Self, in its transcendent form is all pervading. But in this form, it should not be confused with the totality of existence as pantheism does. The Self is beyond this world, as Krishna says:

"...that they are all from Me alone, I am not in them, they are in Me."4

In an eloquent strain, Whitman gives vent to a similar idea:

"O Thou transcendent, Nameless, the fibre and the breath, Light of the light,..."5

The Gita also calls God as "the light of the lights."6 Furthermore in its transcendent form the self is greater than personal God i.e. Ishvara, as Whitman categorically affirms:

1. Quoted in YU, p. 61.
2. YU, p. 67.
3. YU, p. 69.
4. B.G., VIII, 12.
5. The Collected Writings, p. 419.
"And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's-Self is." 1

Whitman's assertion is in tune with the following verse of the Gita:-

"Pooroosh is the great God, the most high spirit, who in this body is the observer, the director, the protector, the partaker." 2

Whitman's Self also assumes as many garbs in 'Song of Myself.' In section eight and ten, he plays the observer, in section forty, the "protector" and in section thirty three he plays the "partaker." 3 In his Self-celebration, Whitman like Krishna, not only assumes the role of God, but also identifies himself with various forms of existence. As a God, he makes holy whatever he touches:-

"Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from;" 4

This self-worship by Whitman is not an instance of "the colossal egoism", which troubled John Burroughs. 5 It is rather "a recognition of divinity in all things," 6 which Whitman has made his religion. Whitman's upgrading of the Self to the level of the Supreme Spirit brings us to another point viz. Whitman's philosophical position in relation to God. According to Dr. Mercer:-

"Leaves of Grass' presents a qualified monism only, but a qualified monism that finds very near parallel in the Lower Knowledge of the Vedanta." 7

1. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 48, p. 82.
4. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 24, p. 49.
7. MERCER, p. 35.
But Dr. S.P. Ranchan thinks that Whitman's God tallies with the Hindu Brahman:

"The God of Whitman, transcendent and nameless
shedding forth universes and the motive of the cosmos,
tallies with the Hindu Brahman. It defies comprehension."

However a close perusal of Whitman's works will reveal that his God is neither the Ishvara of qualified monism, nor the Brahman of non-dualism, but the Purusottama of the Gita, superseding both i.e. Brahman and Ishvara. This supposition finds support in Whitman's utterances in First Person Singular, paralleling those of Krishna, who is an incarnation of Purushottama. However Whitman adds another dimension to his divine personality in that he also imitates the utterances of Arjuna. His empirical ego in a manner not too dissimilar to that of Arjuna, shrinks back after seeing God:

"Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God."

Closely connected with the concept of God is the concept of Maya, which Hindus use in double sense, as an instrument of creation and also as an instrument of illusion. Although Whitman uses the term 'maya', but his conception is not profoundly realized. He conceives of 'maya' as the principle of illusion. He frequently refers to the illusiveness of appearances. In 'Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances', he wonders if we may be deluded "and things we perceive are" only apparition. Whitman sometimes identifies phenomena with illusion, calling it 'maya':

1. RANCHAN, p. 29.
2. The Collected Writings, p. 419.
"Do you suppose yourself advancing on real ground toward a real heroic man? Have you no thought of a dreamer that it may be all maya, illusion?"1

In Dr. Mercer's opinion Whitman calls phenomena (illusion) "through lack of analysis."2 However he insists that illusion is divine. He finds that the appearances, which 'envelop the soul' in a necessary film are our individual 'aromas'. Not least among the films, which overlap the body, is learning, on which both Krishna and Whitman unleash sharp attacks. Krishna derides the scholars of the Vedas, saying that their source-books are merely 'ponds'.3 Whitman too does not attach much importance to the 'bibles':-

"We consider bibles and religious divine - I do not say they are not divine,
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,"4

Whitman's derision of the 'bibles' springs from his belief that the Self is the "origin" of all knowledge. His notion is akin to that of Krishna, voiced in the following verse: -

"...; from Me are memory and knowledge, as well as their loss, I am indeed He who is to be known by all the Vedas. I indeed (am) the author of the Vedanta, and I too the knower of the Vedas."5

Whitman also uses 'maya' as the principle of creation, as envisaged in the Gita. Describing the process of creation Krishna says: -

1. The Collected Writings, p. 123.
2. MERCER, p. 56.
5. B.G., XV, 15.
"Great brahma (prakrti) is My womb: in that I cast
the seed and from it is the birth of all beings,..."

Several lines in Song of Myself resonate with the notion of
'Prakrti-Purusha' union initiated by the creative urge of the
Lord. A few examples will suffice:—

1. "Out of the dimness opposite equals advance...Always
   substance and increase"2

2. "Becoming already a creator!
   Putting myself here and now to the ambushed womb of
   the shadows!"3

3. "A far down I see the huge First Nothing,...........
   I know I was even there........................."4

Whitman's solution of the problem of evil, is closely akin to
that of the Vedanta. A philosophy, which sees God "every where" and
"sees all" in God5 certainly has no place for evil on the metaphysical
plane. Like Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman also denies the 'ultimacy
of evil.' However let us remember that Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman
do not deny the existence of evil on the phenomenal plane. Prof. T.
V. Satyanarayana gives us a fine assessment of Whitman's notion of
evil, conceived of in the light of the teachings of the Gita:—

"Just as in the Gita a sage is described as one who,
"seeing all things equal, may look on the Erahman, on
the cow, on the elephant, on the dog, on the eater of
dogs", indiscriminately, a mystic is past the necessity of
differentiating between good and evil. Whitman often
lives on this plane of mystic knowledge. So he oftentimes
cannot simply see evil. But when he comes down to the
plane of all men, he begins differentiating between good
and evil."6

1. B.G., XIV, 3.
2. COLEY, Song of Myself, Section 2, p. 26.
3. Ibid., Section 41, p. 72.
4. Ibid., Section 44, p. 77.
5. B.G., VI, 30.
6. T.V. Satyanarayana, Whitman and Moral Crisis in The Experience of
   American Literature, edited by D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu, The United
   States Educational Foundation in India, New Delhi, 1969, p. 78.
In fact Whitman assumes a posture, where all differences sink. He asserts that "there is in fact no evil" or if there is, "it is just as important...as anything else."1 It is in this context that he calls himself the poet of "goodness" and "wickedness" both.2 Here again Whitman shares the vision of Krishna, who declares: -

"I am the same in (alike to) all beings. None is hateful, nor dear to Me."3

This vision clears the way for equality of all existence. According to Dr. Mercer that both in the Gita and the Leaves, everybody irrespective of his character and station is equal. Krishna says: -

"Even if a man of the most vile conduct worships me.... (he swiftly becomes) the soul of righteousness."4 "For those who take refuge in Me,...though they are lowly born, woman, Vaisyas, as well as Sudras, they also attain to the highest goal."5

On his part Whitman asserts: -

"This is the meal pleasantly set...this is the meat and drink for natural hunger/ It is for the wicked just the same, as the righteous.... I make appointments with all."6

Hence Whitman, perhaps learns from Krishna, the necessity of eliminating evil, from life, for confirming the fundamental equality of all human beings.

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1. The Collected Writings, p. 19.
2. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 22, p. 46.
5. B.G., IX, 32.
6. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 19, p. 42.
Whitman's moral vision, especially his theory of 'Karma' is also akin to that of the Gita. He rejects the Judo-Christian vision, for he does not believe that this world is governed by the autocratic will of God, that there is supernatural punishment and forgiveness, that there are ranks of the perpetually fallen, condemned without hope. He rather has a firm faith in the doctrine of Karma, which envisages that man is "the author of his own destiny, that what (he is) today is because of what (he has) been in the past and what (he) will be is being determined right now and by what (he has) already done." It is Karma, in accordance with which God creates and governs this world:

"Karma is the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence." 2

The doctrine of Karma is strictly based on the law of causality, to which Whitman also adheres to. In the original unabridged version of 'Preface, 1855, Whitman writes:

"...no results exists now without being from its long antecedent result, and that from its antecedent, and so backward..." 3

In the same edition he eloquently expatiates the inevitability of the Karmic repercussions:

"The law of the past cannot be eluded, The law of the present and future cannot be eluded." 4

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1. RANCHAN, p. 116.
2. B.G., VIII, 3.
Nothing, but only the soul is free from this law:—

"Only the soul is of itself....all else has reference to what ensues."1

The doctrine of 'Karma' has two elements: 'Karmabija' or the seed of Karma (cause) and 'Karmaphala' or the fruit of 'Karma' (effect). Both of these phases are discernible in Whitman. A typical instance of the metaphor of 'Karmabija' can be found in his "Poetry Today in America":—

"I would finally plant, as seeds."2

This utterance closely parallels the following one of Krishna:—

"Great brahma (prakrti) is my womb: in that I cast the seed and from it is the birth of all beings."3

Karmabija produces 'Karmaphala', which is indestructible, which implies that the fruits of deeds, good or bad, are never lost.

Krishna phrases this idea in the following manner:—

".....neither in this life nor hereafter is there destruction for him; for never does any one who does good,..... tread the path of woe."4

The man of righteous conduct goes to heaven but when the stock of his good actions is exhausted, he falls again.5 Whitman likewise sees the virtue of a sort of discipline, while on earth. He says that the fleshy body gives the soul "proportions to live in other

1. COULEY, p. 19.
2. Quoted in O.P. SHARMA, p. 172.
3. B.G., XIV, 3.
4. B.G., VI, 40.
5. B.G., VI, 41.
spheres." Whitman also believes with Krishna that these proportions cannot be transmitted from one person to the other person. Thus each must acquire for himself, for, as Whitman says:—

"No one can acquire for another — not one
No one can grow for another — not one." 1

Here Whitman deviates from Judeo-Christian moral tradition, where a man is likely to reap the harvest of another man's actions. In this way Whitman gives us a well conceived doctrine of Karma. However his doctrine lacks the "subtlety and sophistication" of Hindu thinkers perhaps because, he was not "a dialectician." 2

"The Karmic aspect of Whitman's poetry is further reinforced by his avowed faith in the doctrine of reincarnation, which is its logical corollary." 3 The doctrine of rebirth or metempsychosis is implied both by the doctrine of Karma and that of immortality of the soul; the impressions caused by the consequences of deeds, do not disappear, so long the soul does not achieve final liberation. Hence the soul has to suffer rebirth in order to enjoy or suffer the consequences of those deeds. Death implies the death of only the gross body. Man's subtle body continues to exist, with twenty four subtle elements, carrying the impressions of man's past deeds. When the soul is separated from these impressions, man achieves liberation. Even after this 'Atman' continues to exist in the form of "pure consciousness." All this implies that man's soul is eternal, as Krishna says:—

1. Quoted in O.P. SHARMA, p. 173.
2. RANJAN, p. 117.
"Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we all shall cease to be. As the soul passes into this body through childhood youth and age, even so is its taking on of another body."1

Accordingly Whitman also declares:—

"I do not think seventy years is the time of man or woman, ... Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me or any one else."2

This strong belief in the immortality of the soul, naturally strikes an optimistic chord in the Gita:—

"Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new."3

Reincarnation in Whitman is a progression towards an ever higher state of development. Consequently it produces, a certain optimism in facing death. Death gives place to new birth. He writes:—

"Joy! Shipmate...Joy!

. . . . . . . . .

Please to my Soul at death I cry,4

Births have brought us riches and variety,
And other births, will bring us richness and variety."5

These words take our mind back to Krishna's promise to Arjuna that righteous men are born in the house of the pure and prosperous.6 In the final analysis, Whitman's Karmic theory is a little, broad-based,
in the sense, that he applies his doctrine to individuals as well as to institutions and nations. In its social aspect, Whitman's doctrine is closer to his native Judeo-Christian tradition, but in its optimism and in its note of affirmation, it is closer to that of the Gita. According to Dr. Ranchan Whitman "bequeathes an interesting moral vision, a vision grounded in hope and causality... fullness and fulfilment."

The most interesting point of Whitman's philosophy is that his belief was crowned with experience. He is said to have achieved cosmic consciousness. According to Richard W. Bucke and William James the basis of this experience was Occidental. Recently James E. Miller has viewed 'Song of Myself': one of the most remarkable expressions of this mystical experience, through the framework of the traditional mystical experience, as sketched forth briefly in William James's 'Varieties of Religious Experience' and, more particularly, as set forth in detail in Evelyn Underhill's 'Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness.' However elsewhere Miller peculiarly argues that Whitman's mysticism is "both - Christian and Oriental - "and neither":

"Whitman's mysticism is his own, peculiarly American, paradoxically compounded of both the physical and spiritual, denying nothing, accepting all. Whitman could not become passive like the Oriental, nor selfless like the Christian; he remains the Mystic Vagabond striding down the open road singing his joyous carols of the miraculous self and the mystic merge."

1. RANCHAN, p. 121.
On the other hand Malcolm Couley defines the structure of the 'Song', primarily in terms of Indian mysticism, an analysis to which V.K. Chari provides more substance. The basic difference between the Eastern and Western mysticism is that the former, being passive in spirit, promises enlightenment through self-suppression, whereas the latter suggests it through transfiguration. However, the Gita, on the whole, suggests neither passivity nor self-suppression of the type, associated with extreme type of asceticism. All the more Krishna grants Arjuna the divine vision ('divyachakṣu') to behold his cosmic form (Viśvarūpa). This underscores Krishna's faith in transfiguration. Besides the close affinity of Whitman's vision with that of Krishna should leave no body in doubt that Whitman's mysticism is a close kin to that of the Gita; which was possibly Whitman's guide-book also.

The question whether Whitman followed some well defined path of yoga, as suggested by Krishna and undertook some specified practices is open to speculation. No foreigner, howsoever zealous, could be expected to practise yoga, in accordance with the exacting standards of India, during those days. Whitman was no exception. Nevertheless, from his life and works, we can detect, certain important points, which can give us an idea of his enthusiasm for 'yogic' exercises. In the Gita, Krishna prescribes 'Karmayoga' for men of active temperament. The central point of this 'Yoga' is disinterested action, i.e. action without attachment, for attachment produces desire; desire produces passion and passion leads man to the path of self-destruction. Therefore Krishna advises Arjuna to control passions.

rather "to slay this sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination."  
It is interesting that Whitman also shows a keen awareness of the self-destructive nature of "tumultuous senses" in section twenty eight of 'Song of Myself', a point, which has been examined earlier in this chapter. The spirit of non-attachment is also central to Bhaktiyoga (the Path of Devotion); but in this form of 'yoga', it occurs in a different way, in that the devotee is required to do work only for the sake of love. Whitman, the great lover as he is, shows a "cheerful willingness" to "give up all" and "suffer all", for the sake of others.  

Rajayoga (Royal Path) also enjoins the control of desire, by meditation in solitude, although its way of meditation differs from that of 'Dhyanyoga (the 'Yoga' of Meditation). For 'Rajayoga', as pointed out by V.K. Chari "aims at the extinction of conscious thought", whereas 'Dhyanyoga' "aims rather at the transformation or sublimation of conscious thought."  
The classical 'Rajayoga' as formulated by Patanjali, is an extremely intricate path. Krishna, however, gives us a simplified version, by suggesting the lifting of the Self by self, by conquering desires. Interestingly, Whitman also wants to control his desires by strengthening his "real self". He believes that the "real self" will not allow "passions and appetite to triumph finally:

"You degradations, you tussle with passions and appetites,

1. B.G., III, 41.
2. The Collected Writings, p. 419.
4. B.G., VI, 10–18 and XVIII, 51–53
Ah, think not you finally triumph, My real self has yet to come forth,
I shall yet march forth o'er mastering, till all lies beneath me,
It shall yet stand up the soldier of ultimate victory." ¹

According to Dr. V.K. Chari, "Whitman's life was a continued effort for self-elevation by "struenuine contemplation."² In 'Democratic Vistas' he speaks of the cultivation of a "great masterful spirit" — "a strong mastership of the general inferior self by the superior Self..."³ In 'Song of Myself', Whitman invites his soul to "loafe", a phase of meditation, according to Mercer; for loafing results, into the expansion of his self. For this loafing, Whitman like the 'yoga' described in the Bhagavad-Gita, goes to the secluded place:—

"In paths untrodden
   . . . . . . . .
Here by myself away from the clank of the world,
Tallying and talk'd to here by tongues aromatic,"⁴

However, Whitman's most favourite 'yoga' seems to be the 'Yoga' of Devotion, the central element of which is 'love', which gives the devotee 'peace', calm of mind and knowledge:—

"Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth
And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And that a kelson of the creation is love;"⁵

In the Yoga of Devotion the most important condition is complete surrender to God. In his final advice to Arjuna, Krishna asks him:—

1. The Collected Writings, p. 479.
2. CHARI, p. 103.
3. Quoted in CHARI, pp. 103-104.
4. The Collected Writings, pp. 112-113.
5. COULEY, Song of Myself, Section 5, p. 29.
"Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils."¹

Whitman also puts this condition before his followers :-

1. "For your life adhere to me"²
2. "You would have to give up all else - I alone would expect to be your God, sole and exclusive."³

In the eyes of God every devotee, good or bad is equal. Unlike Calvinistic Christianity freedom is granted to all, for Krishna assures his devotees :-

"I am the same in (alike) to all beings. None is hateful nor dear to Me."⁴

Like Krishna Whitman's arms are open to all :-

"Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial,"⁵

Lord Buddha's wise man also rises above the duality of good and evil:-

"I call him a Brahman indeed who has passed beyond attachment both to good and evil."⁶

Like Krishna and Buddha, Whitman also transcends this duality, for he declares :-

1. "I am not the poet of goodness only...I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also."⁷
2. "I am myself just as much evil as good."⁸

¹ B.G., XVIII, 66.
³ Quoted in Mercier, p. 76.
⁴ B.G., IX, 29.
⁵ The Collected Writings, p. 150.
⁷ COULEY, Song of Myself, Section 22, p. 46.
⁸ The Collected Writings, p. 19.
In the Gita, the 'yogin' after attaining perfection becomes an integrated and perfect wise man — a 'Sthitaprajna' or stable in intelligence:

"When a man puts away all the desires of his mind..., and when his spirit is content in itself, then he is called stable in intelligence."¹

Whitman also gives up 'desires'; he does not ask for "good fortune", for he himself becomes "good fortune."² Furthermore, describing a poet in 'Blue Ontario's shores', he writes:—

"Of these States, the poet is the equable man,

Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad,
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither more nor less."³

The integrated man is self-reliant. He is unallured by pleasure and untroubled by pain. He "beholds the Self through the Self and rejoices in the Self."⁴ Furthermore:—

"That in which he finds this supreme delight, perceived by the intelligence and beyond the reach of the senses, wherein established, he no longer falls away from the truth."⁵

Whitman also reaches this state, wherein the joy of the self-poised soul transcends the joy afforded by the senses:—

"O my Soul, vibrated back to me, from them — from facts, sight, hearing, touch my phrenology, reason, articulation, comparison, memory, and the like;
The real life of my senses and flesh, transcending my senses and flesh."1

Krishna says that the integrated man "attains to peace", for in him:—

"...all desires enter as waters into the sea, which, though ever being filled is ever motionless."2

Whitman also is imperturbable in the midst of nature because he is the master; and because he is "secure...in the soul."3 The 'Sthitaprajna' in the Gita is blessed with a vision of equality. Hence everything is equal to him:—

"He who is equal-minded among friends, companions and foes, among those who are neutral and impartial, among those who are hateful and related, among saints and sinners he excels."4

Whitman too finds his enemy equally divine with himself:—

"That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead."5

Believing earnestly in the essential unity of all, Whitman makes his dinner ready for all, "for the wicked" as well as for "the righteous" and makes appointments with all."6 The man of wisdom views all living phenomena with equal eyes. To him "a clod, a stone and a piece of gold are the same."7 Whitman, like a 'Sthitaprajna' also finds everything equal:—

1. Quoted in MERGER, p. 129.
2. B.G., II, 70.
3. MERGER, p. 129.
5. The Collected Writings, p. 321.
6. COOLEY, Song of Myself, Section 19, p. 42.
7. B.G., VI, 8.
"...all the things of the universe are perfect miracles, each are profound as any." 1

Finally the 'Stithaprajna' comes to identify himself, with every object. He sees himself in every object:

"He whose self is harmonized by Yoga seeth the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; everywhere he sees the same." 2

In his Cosmic Vision Whitman also experiences the same phenomenon. He finds himself everywhere. Prof. Pandeya observes that in 'Song of Myself' "he sees all people in himself and himself in all people, the old as well as the young, the foolish as well as the wise." 3

According to Krishna the Mahatma is one, who finds that all is Vasudeva (The Lord of the Universe) and because the transcendent Self and Vasudeva are not separate, the Self is all. Whitman's poetry is a record of this "awakened Self", which experiences identity:

"All these I feel I am." 5

According to Prof. Nambiar, in the Gita, there is a verse which seems to refer to the type of experience in which all identities absorbed into the Self. 6

"By Me all this universe is pervaded through My unmanifested form. All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them." 7

1. The Collected Writings, p. 23.
2. B.G., VI, 29.
3. PANDEYA, p. 6.
4. B.G., VI, 30.
5. COWLEY, Song of Myself, Section 33, p. 62.
6. NAMBIAR, p. 81.
7. B.G., IX, 4.
In Whitman too all "beings, things and experience become a part of the transcendent Self."¹ In exalted moments, the external world becomes an ultimate part, rather a prospect in the mind.

We should not persuade ourselves to believe that Whitman's experiences are merely poetic projections or outbursts; they are, as their eloquence and magnitude suggest, the spontaneous overflow of ecstatic experiences. He has warned us in advance that one, who views his 'Leaves' as merely a 'literary performance', will not get at the real meanings of his poems. His 'Leaves', especially his 'Song of Myself' should be evaluated in the light of his mysticism. Whitman's status as a mystic is by now a confirmed fact. Anne Fremantle recognizes him as one of the foremost Protestant mystics.²

Doubts, if any, about Whitman's being a mystic spring from the belief that mystic experiences are the products of some specific 'yogic' exercises, which he could not and would not have undertaken. It is, however, a misconception. Patanjali, the greatest authority on Yoga, makes it abundantly clear that illumination or transformation can come about by more than one means. It can come by either birth, or drugs or 'mantra' (prayer) austerity or ecstasy. Yoga Vasistha tell us:—

"Truth dawns by itself upon the mind of the tranquil, who are equally good and friendly to all beings."³

Whitman can easily be placed among 'love-intoxicated mystics'.

Prof. Nambiar argues that the mystical experience, resulting from body-soul conjunction in 'Song of Myself' especially in Section five resembles:—

¹. NAMBIAR, p. 81.
³. Quoted in NAMBIAR, p. 39.
"physically and psychologically, the experience of the Kundalini Yoga, which induces, during intense contemplation, an upward spiralling by stages along the spine, of the physical sense of well being, which soon becomes an advanced condition of consciousness. This, as objectively reported by reliable authorities, may give way to a vision, revelation, illumination – that final mystical experience abundantly described in Judaic and Christian as well as in Hindu Scriptures."  

However, let us remember that the Kundalini Yoga is a very specialized and intricate type of 'Yoga' – which Whitman possibly, could not have practised. Whitman took more interest in the contemplative and devotional aspects of the yoga, which are also central to the Gita. Besides, other elements of the Gita-'Yoga', viz. non-attachment, discrimination, discipline etc., as we have seen earlier, find a place in Whitman's mysticism. Whitman's ecstasy and vision are similar to that of Krishna.  

Like mystics and 'yogees' Whitman had a "magnetic influence and "healing touch." Dr. Buxes speaks of his touch, as possessing a power, which no words can describe."  

William Sloane Kennedy felt "a curious state of exaltation and excitement" in Whitman's presence.  

Edward Carpenter was aware of "a certain radiant power, a large benign effluence and inclusiveness, as of the sun, which filled out the place where he was." Furthermore this magic power, corresponding to the 'mantra-sakti' of Hindus, appears to be present in his works.

2. Quoted in NAMBIAR, p. 72.  
3. Ibid., p. 72.  
4. Ibid., p. 72.
as well. To sum up our discussion, we can say that there is not even an iota of doubt that Whitman "the Sanyasin of America" as Swami Vivekanand preferred to call him, was more indebted to the Gita for his ideas, poetic faith and mysticism (however "sporadic") than to any other book.

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1. Quoted in NAMBIAR, p. 73.