CHAPTER 4

"THE SAGE OF CONCORD"

In the spring of 1845, J. Eliot Cabot lent Emerson the copy of the Bhagavad-Gita. He was so much fascinated by it that he immediately (May 30, 1845) wrote to his friend John Chapman in London:

"There is a book, which I very much want, of which this is the title, "The Bhagvat Geeta, or Dialogues of Kreesha & Arjoun; in eighteen lectures; with notes. Translated from the original in Sansakret, or ancient language of the Brahmins, by Charles Wilkins; London; C. Nourse; 1875."1

Emerson showed great reluctance to return Cabot's copy till he received his own, the arrival of which, he greeted as "an event."2 Eversince he voluntarily took upon himself the responsibility of popularizing the book. He introduced this Hindu Scripture to Thoreau, Emily Mervin Drury, John G. Whittier, Dismick, etc.3 and advised George Partridge Bradford to purchase a copy of it like his own "without the Sanscrit."4 He strongly recommended the book to many others and lent them his personal copy so much so that it was used even "more widely" than that in the Harvard College Library.5 Ralph L. Rusk remarks that "the lending of that book (the Gita) was a habit with Emerson."6 Emerson's keen interest in popularizing

4. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 479.
5. CHRISTY, p. 23.
the book can be gauged from the fact that he tore Cousin's fine sketch of the Gita and sent it to his friend John Boynton Hill\(^1\), when his copy was not in spare. No body could have done more to promote the Gita.

All this indicates that Emerson attached tremendous value to Krishna's Lectures. His fantastic admiration challenges comparison with Goethe's poetical eulogy of Kalidas's Shakuntala and Schopenhauer's ecstatic outburst for the Upanishads:

"I owed—my friend and I owed—a magnificent day to the Bhagavat Geeta — It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large serene consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions, which exercise us."\(^2\)

Because the Gita answered the questions, which puzzled the American mind, Emerson intended to "cherish the venerable oracle."\(^3\) Struck with the inspiring qualities of it, Emerson wrote to Emma Lazarus on May 8, 1968:

"And of books, there is another which, when you have read, you shall sit for a while & then write a poem, — the Bhagavat Geeta", but read it in Charles Wilkins's translation.\(^4\)

Again, when Emerson sent a message of encouragement to such an eminent man as Carlyle on August 5, 1850, he thought fit to invoke the Gita:

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2. Quoted in CHRISTY, p. 23.
3. Ibid., p. 23.
"I wish you a great success in your crusade against the Times. It is very easy to see that as no less than Krishna sits beside Prince Arjuna in the chariot, so Destiny too writes many fiery sentences in these pamphlets."1

But the quality of the Gita, which impressed him most, was perhaps its ennobling and liberating quality for he recommended it to the Britishers as a panacea for "largeness" and as a remedy to liberate them from their "cultural provincialism."2 This recommendation implies that Emerson regarded the Gita, as the chief instrument of what he called 'Oriental largeness'. This 'Song of God', gradually became for him a measure of excellence. Interestingly, when he wished to praise Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' for incomparable things incomparably expressed, he evoked the Gita and described it as "a remarkable mixture of the Bhagavad Gita and the New York Herald."3

But Emerson knew that this Hindu scripture was, not meant for all, but only for "those students who are ripe for it", as he wrote to William Rounsville Alger on October 19, 1856.4 Any way he drank deep its mystic waters and absorbed its philosophy to express it in his works, a point underscored by Emerson-scholars. In the Gita, Charles Malloy found "the whole of Emerson's philosophy."5 Leyla Goren had the same feeling:-

"When I first read the Bhagavad-Gita, I was overwhelmed with its beauty. I immediately noticed, how similar it was to some of Emerson's works such as Over-Soul or Braham."6

2. YU, p. 37.
5. Quoted in LEYLA GOREN, p. 46.
6. LEYLA GOREN, p. 47.
'The Over-Soul' and 'Brahma' are the master-keys to Emerson's conceptual framework. They represent rather the two phases of the growth of his philosophy. The influence of the Gita on Emerson's Brahma is by now an established fact. But its influence on the formulation of the concept of the Over-Soul is still as controversial as ever. In view of Emerson's so-called acquaintance with the Gita as a book only in 1845, any attempt to identify the ideas of the Gita in Emerson's thought as incorporated in his essays and poems written before 1845, may sound unconvincing. However this view cannot hold out against the overwhelming external and internal evidence which conclusively proves that the philosophical, religious and mystic concepts of India, of which the Gita is an essence, were at the disposal of Emerson during the gestation years of his thought. This point is underscored by the facts and arguments, brought into limelight by K.W. Cameron, Leyla Goren, Ran Mohan Singh, K.K. Shukla, J.P. Rao Rayapati and others. The old conclusions that the East gave Emerson only "a few trappings of speech"¹, that he became "an Oriental in earnest"² only in 1845, that he reached Orientalism via Platonism, more accurately via Neoplatonism³ and that the Orient had played no part in his Transcendentalism⁴ have by now evaporated. In the first chapter of this dissertation, it has been proved that Transcendentalism can only be explained in terms of Indian mysticism. In the second chapter, it has been established that the mystic ideas

3. YU, pp. 26 & 27.
4. WHICHER, p. 115.
whether in Platonism or Neoplatonism or in the Bible or in European Mysticism, have their sources in Indian thought. The aim of this chapter is to prove that Emerson became an Orientalist much earlier than what has been suggested by Christy and Carpenter, that Emerson got from the East not only "trappings of speech", but solid material to raise the mansion of his thought and that the Gita played a tremendous role in the formulation of Emerson's concepts.

R.M. Singh argued that Emerson was an Orientalist, at the age of eighteen (i.e. 1821), whereas Cameron and Leyla believed that his interest in India began as early as in 1818. In fact it began even earlier. In all likelihood Emerson absorbed Indian ideas from his boyhood, as they were present in the very atmosphere in which he was brought up. He inherited interest in India consciously or unconsciously from his father. This interest was fortified by his aunt Mary Moody Emerson. In case of mystic ideas it is probable that he might have unconsciously absorbed some of them from the native sources. With the blood of eight generations of divines in his veins, he might have also drunk at the well of the Bible, which, as you have seen earlier had received the mystic currents from India via the classical and the Alexandrian sources. The mystic elements received from the native and the Biblical sources could have become potent forces, which produced mystical tendencies in Emerson's mind — the tendencies which were strengthened by his personal needs and his subsequent studies in Indian lore.

1. LEYLA GOREN, pp. 8-9.
2. Chapter II of this dissertation.
3. Ibid.
Waldo's father William Emerson evinced, a keen interest in Indian customs and philosophy. Emerson borrowed from the Boston Library Society on Dec. 19, 1812 and kept for five days, William Tennant's 'Indian Recreations'.

William Emerson's library also contained two important books on India. The first was William Enfield's 'The History of Philosophy'. The Chapter V of Book I of this work was titled, "Of the Philosophy of the Indians." Its "Appendix" dealt with the 'Progress and Present State of Philosophy in the Indies and Among the Chinese'. Emerson's interest in the book can be gauged from the fact that he borrowed the book from the Boston Library Society, after the auction of his father's library on August 27, 1822. Furthermore, as an undergraduate at Harvard he made use of the College-copy, which had been donated by Thomas Hellis.

The second book connected with India and accessible to Emerson in his father's library was Joseph Priestley's 'A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of Hindoos and other Ancient Nations; with Remarks on Mr. Dupin's Origin of all Religions, The Laws of Institutions of Moses Methodized...'. Northumberland, 1799. This book is famous for what is known as Priestleyanism, which has certain marked affinities with Vedanta.

Emerson's interest in India continued to swell. In 1818 he read Thomas Duer Broughton's "Selections from the Popular Poetry of

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1. Kenneth Walter Cameron: 'The Transcendentalists and Minerva', p. 841; hereafter referred to as MINERVA.
3. Ibid., p. 82.
4. "Although Priestley's conclusions may not have been influenced by the Laws of Manu, at all, still it is odd that his thought and that of Vedanta should be so akin, if he had not been influenced somewhat by it." MERCER, p. 17.
the Hindoos'; in 1819 he studied Volume 1 of Lord Woodhouselee's 'Considerations on the Present Political state of India' and Thomas Moore's 'Lalla Rookh', notable for its extensive notes from many books, including books on India. In this connection, 1820 is the most fruitful year, in which Emerson read 'Lalla Rookh' (again); Edward Gibbon's 'The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire', containing an exposition of Zoroastrianism, which closely resembles Indian religions; the Volume 1 of the ' Asiatic Miscellany', containing Indian hymns including 'A Hymn to Narayana', translated by Sir William Jones; Grant's 'Restoration of Learning in the East', which attempted to draw a parallel between Hindu philosophy and Berkeley's idealism and 'Southey's 'Curse of Kehama'.

Of these books 'A Hymn to Narayana' is important in the sense that it has the concept of Maya (Illusion), one of the favourite topics of Emerson. However even more important is 'Curse of Kehama' for in the appended notes, Southey has quoted from the English translations of the Indian classics, including the Bhagavad Gita. Thus Emerson's acquaintance with the Gita, in all probability, began in 1820.

2. Ibid.
4. CHRISTY, p. 278.
6. "It doubtless served as an early pointer in his life long quest for a sustaining Transcendental religious faith" - CAMERON, p. 578.
Before composing his 'Indian Superstition', Emerson had read Thomas Campbell's poem 'The Pleasures of Hope', the appended notes of which included important matter on India. The poem provided the theme and a part of the subject matter to Emerson's Pythologian poem 'Improvement', written at Harvard during the early spring of 1820 and delivered in April of the same year. It was also the source of the theme of 'universal improvement' expressed at the end of 'Indian Superstition'. A rough draft (manuscript pages 5 and 6) of the poem (Indian Superstition) discovered by Cameron, contains such expressions as 'The crystal cup of Immortality' and 'when Brahma, for thy land, in distance viewed.' We can get, from such phrases, an idea of Emerson's interest in Indian ideas.

During Emerson's college days, the whole Boston atmosphere was surcharged with Orientalism. There was a popular taste for Oriental themes, scenery and pageantry in the Boston Theatre. Songs on Indian subjects were in the air. One collection of popular songs that circulated among college students, seems to have provided Emerson with models for some of his own college songs, including "Sadi the Moor" and "Indian Philosopher." Orientalism or Indianism also pervaded in trade and educational circles. The Harvard College Library, during Emerson's student days had books on India by knowledgeable authors such as Alexander Chalmers, William Back-
ford, Jean Antoine Dubois, William Adam, Henry War and Ramohun Roy, Bernard Picart, John Richardson, Carwethen, Claudia Buchanan, Boulanger, Donald Campbell, Quintin Craufurd, Alexander Hamilton, La Croze, Henry Lord Carston Niebuhr, John Richardson, Gui Tachard, etc. The books of these authors and the occasional articles on Oriental subjects in the Atheneum, or, Spirit of the English Magazines (14 volumes) formed the parts of Orientalia, which Emerson was supposed to know. It would "bear further witness", observes Cameron, "to the considerable body of Indian lore contributing to America's enlarging awareness of the antipodes long before the Romantic writers exploited the Eastern scriptures."  

To this formidable list of authors and their books compiled by Cameron, we can add two other authors, whose books were popular with the missionary minded Christians: George Foster ('Sketches of the Mythology and Customs of the Hindoos') and George Burden ('Missionary Anecdotes'). The harvest of Oriental lore continued to interest Emerson even after his college days. He composed for his pupils, in 1823, a short story based upon extracts from Mark Wilks' 'Historical Sketches of the South India'. The same year Emerson read 'Religion and Character of Hindoos', published in Edinberg Review, Vol. XXIX, pp. 377-403. It is indicated by his Journals, I, 303-4 that this anonymous article was read and commented upon in 1823. It was a review of several books on India, particularly of

2. Ibid., pp. 9, 9 & 13.  
William Ward's "Account of the writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos", which Emerson later drew from the Harvard College Library. The article recorded among other things "the number and absurdity" of Hindu-gods and the 'cruelty' and the 'sensuality' of the Hindu-religion. The temper reflected in the young Emerson's Journals after reading the article was as biased and unfriendly as the article itself. However the Edinburg Review occupies a very important place in Emerson's readings, in so far as it published many articles on India and translations of many Hindu scriptures from 1805 to 1818 and later. Dr. Man Mohan Singh informs that Emerson borrowed many of these periodicals from libraries during the years 1820 to 1825.

Emerson's initial reaction towards India was that of indifference, caused by his "Anglo-Saxon sense of superiority" and also by reading unfair rather hostile accounts of India by the missionaries. But with the growth of his idealism, his attitude changed. "Aunt Mary's enthusiasm and the lure inherent in the books of the Orientals eventually vanquished the boy's indifference." Gradually the Indian books became his dear delight, because they answered his probing questions in a way, which western writers never did. In February 1824, when he was only twenty one, Emerson entitled a long passage in his Journals "Asia Origin" in which he wished to go back "to the old mansion house of Asia" withdrawing from "the noisy and overgrown world." This change was discernible by 1825, when "the

1. See CHRISTY, p. 70.
3. CHRISTY, p. 66.
4. MAYO, p. 167.
Young Emerson remembered" with pride and gratitude "all great teachers of mankind, particularly the Orientals, a gesture not much in keeping with the spiritual preparation for the ministry in a religion which is the most exclusive." However Emerson's acquaintance in depth, with Indian thought began around 1830, when he read some outstanding expositions of Indian philosophy by Joseph Marie Degerando, Victor Cousin and perhaps by Anquetil Duperron.

In Emerson's Journals II, 334 (1830) is cited a very important work, Upanishad, a Latin translation of the Upanishads from a Persian version. The book should have been of especial interest, as it contained the translations of the Brahadaranyak and Chandogya, the two of the most important Upanishads. The two together contain all the important tenets of the Upanishads of which the Gita is an essence. However it is not certain if Emerson had read the book. William H. Gilman and Alfred R. Ferguson suppose that his (Emerson's) source of information for the reference was not the book itself, but Degerando. Emerson read avidly Cousin's Introduction to the History of Philosophy, which he acquired soon after its publication. For his views on Indian Philosophy, Cousin was indebted to Colebrooke's Essays. The book provided Emerson, apart from other valuable

2. For the Parallels between the Upanishads and the Gita see Haas appended to The Thirteen Principal Upanishads by R.W. Hume.
4. See DALE RIEPE, pp. 36-37.
information, a challenging summary of the Gita. Another authoritative source of information about Indian philosophy was Joseph Marie Dagarando’s 'Histoire Comparee des systemes de philosophie'. Emerson drew vols. I and II of the book from the Boston Athenæum on Jan. 1, 1830. On February 1, of the same year, he drew vol. IV. He again drew the book on April 6, 1831 (volume not designated). Emerson’s Journal II, 333, contains, a most illuminating passage, which is a digest of what Dagarando had written of Oriental cosmogenies, theogonies and idealism, together with the works of various translators, whom Emerson later read.1

In 1836 Emerson read William Jones’ 'Institute of Hindu Law; or The Ordinances of Menu, according to the Gloss of Calluca, comprising the Indian systems of Duties Religious and Civil'. The book discussed many philosophical and religious doctrines such as Creation, Transmigration and Final Eeatitude. Before the arrival of the Gita in 1845, on Emerson’s reading list figures Jacob Bryant’s 'A New System or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology', Horace Hayman Wilson’s translation of the 'Megha Duta or Cloud Messenger' (1837), Sir William Jones’ Works (1840), Charles Wilkins’ 'The Hestopades of Veeshnook Sarna' (1844) and Eugene Burnough’s 'Introduction a l’histoire du Buddhisme indien' (1844), etc.2

Apart from this indirect passage of the spiritual and religious concepts, which find expression in the Gita, there is a strong possibility of Emerson’s gleaning them from his direct reading of

1. CHRISTY, p. 278.
2. CHRISTY, pp. 284-287.
the stray quotations, extracts and summaries of the 'Indian scripture'. We can suspect this fact from his correspondence with Elizabeth Hoar. After receiving his personal copy of the Gita from London, he wrote to the lady on June 17, 1845:—

"The only other event is the arrival in Concord of the "Bhagavat-Geeta", the much renowned book of Buddhism, extracts of which I have often admired, but never before held the book in my hands." 1

Emerson, got the first feel of the Gita, as he admitted in August 4, 1873 letter to Friedrich Max Müller, from Victor Cousin:—

"I remember I owed my first taste for this fruit to Cousin's sketch, in his first Lectures, of the Dialogue between Krishna & Arjuna, & I still prize the first chapters of that Bhagavat as wonderful, & would gladly learn any accurate date of their age." 2

The fact that Emerson read Cousin's lectures in 1837, has been admitted in his May 24, 1831 letter to his brother William. 3 Victor Cousin in the third lecture delivered on the 29th of April, 1828 and contained in 'Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie', dealt with the Gita rather in detail. Kurt F. Leidecker thinks that from the summary one can detect the original "for many a Thought phrased poetically by Emerson." 4 We can do no better than reproduce Victor Cousin's "challenging summary" of the Gita:—

"The Bhagavad-Gita—what it Reveals of Indian Civilization
Open, for instance, the Bhagavad-Gita; it is a short episode in an immense poem. Two great armies, the Pandava and the Kourous, are in the presence of each other, and

2. Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 246.
4. LEIDECKER, p. 44.
are ready to engage in battle. A boundless carnage is at hand. In one of the two armies, there is a young warrior, individually very brave, but who, upon the eve of shedding the blood of his relations and friends, for two armies are composed of friends and relations, finds his courage failing. He requests another personage to advance his chariot into the middle of the plain, for the purpose of ascertaining the situation of affairs, and having cast a brief glance upon the two hosts, the good Arshuhas vows to Krishna, his uncertainty. What is the reply? Truly, Arshuhas, your pity is exceedingly ridiculous. Why do you speak of friends and of relations? Why of men? Relations, friends, men, beasts, or stones, all are one. A perpetual and eternal energy has created all, which you see and renew it without cessation. What is today a man, was yesterday, a plant, and tomorrow may become a plant once more. The principle of everything is eternal; what value of aught else? You are, a Scehatia, a man of the caste of warriors, doomed to the combat. Therefore do battle; a fearful carnage will be the result. Be it so; tomorrow is the sun will shine upon the world, and will illuminate new scenes, and the eternal principle will continue to subsist. Beyond this principle everything is illusion. The fundamental error is to consider as true that which is only apparent. If you attach any value to appearances, you deceive yourself; if you attach it to your actions, you deceive yourself again; for all is illusion, action itself, when it is regarded as real, is illusion also; the beauty and the merit of an action consist in performing it with profound indifference as to the results which it may produce. It is necessary to act, undoubtedly, but to act as if one acted not. Nothing exists but the eternal principle; being, in itself. It follows that it is the supreme of wisdom to let thing pass, to do what we are compelled to do, but as if we did it not, and without concerning ourselves about the result, interiorly motionless, with our eyes fixed unceasingly upon the absolute principle which alone exists without a true existence."

"Such, under a somewhat occidental form, is the philosophy of this sublime episode...You will comprehend how human nature must tremble and shrink into nothingness, before a theism so terrible and filled with chimeras, and represented by symbols that are extravagant and gigantic; how art, innate powerless endeavour to represent being in itself, must fall, without reserve, into colossal and irregular creations; how God being all and man nothing, a formidable theocracy must press upon humanity, take away all liberty, all movement, all practical interest and consequently all true morality; and how man despising
himself, was unable to recall, the memory of actions, in which he supposed himself not the real agent; and therefore, why there is no history of men in India, and no chronology.\textsuperscript{1}

It is of course an outstanding summary, which gives us not only the vivid picture of the setting, but also a fair account of the cardinal concepts of the Gita viz. Atman, Brahman, Maya, Transmigration, Action, Duty and the Yoga of concentration.\textsuperscript{2}

Emerson might have got the first feel of the quotations from the Gita even earlier i.e. in 1820, when he read. Southey’s Curse of Kehama, during his Harvard days. Southey had quoted from the Gita, in the notes appended to the book. Such a keen reader as Emerson should not have skipped over those quotations. The chances of Emerson’s reading the 'extracts' from the Gita before the publication of his seminal books are fairly high. Wilkins\textsuperscript{3} translation of the Gita was in the collection of the New York Society Library as early as 1838. Considering the importance of Boston during those days, we can assume that this translation was available to the Bostonians much earlier than 1838. It is likely that the translations of the Gita made by Parraud (1787) August Wilhelm Schlegel (1823) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1826) were also circulating in Boston. Emerson was aware of these translations, as is reflected from his May 3, 1868 letter to Emma Lazarus.\textsuperscript{4} However no definite date can be assigned to Emerson’s acquaintance with these translations.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Quoted in CAMERON, p. 578; underlining added.
\item See the underlined portions in the summary.
\item RAJSEKHARAIH, p. 132.
\item Emerson-Letters, Vol. VI, p. 15.
\end{enumerate}
Besides these translations, there were articles on the Gita, circulating in the Boston area. Sir William Jones had spoken of it in glowing terms even before it was translated by Charles Wilkins. In view of Emerson's keen interest in Jones' works and articles published in the Asiatic Researches, it can be supposed that he might have received some ideas of the Gita from these sources. There was in the September 1845 number of the popular Whig Review, an article by E.B. Green, entitled 'The Bhagat Geeta — And The Doctrine of Immortality.' The existence of such other articles can not be ruled out. Furthermore 'extracts' made from the Gita were also popular. Kurt F. Leidecker writes that "it has been suggested that Cabot, perhaps someone else in Concord, had made extracts from the Bhagavad-Gita." Some idea of the existence of this extract, we can get from Emerson's letter to Cabot written on August 19, 1846:

"I have had for months no excuse for keeping these extracts from the Bhagavat." 3

Ralph L. Rusk thinks that the 'extracts' in question meant the book itself. But the language of the letter does not warrant his supposition. In the light of these facts, it would be natural to assume that in his extensive reading Emerson "came across published extracts from and appraisals of the Bhagavad-Gita, which, by 1840, were, of course, numerous." 4

1. RAJSEKHARAIH, p. 105.
2. LEIDECKER, p. 44.
4. LEIDECKER, p. 44.
On the basis of the above facts, it is legitimate to conclude that during his formative period, Emerson had gained a fair knowledge of the Gita-concepts. By direct or indirect reading of the 'extracts' from the Gita, he knew that the Indian philosophy was the first philosophy of mind; that in it there was not an unhappy divorce between religion and philosophy; that the world emanates directly from the creative power of Brahma; that the self of the man is one with Brahman; that the divine Maya is the cause of appearances; that the divine justice manifests itself as a law of compensation operating through metempsychosis; and that man has "double-consciousness." He also knew the anti-historical approach of Indian philosophy.

Nearly all early biographers of Emerson have noted his Oriental leanings. Among them his son Edward Waldo, Moncure Daniel Conway, James Eliot Cabot and George Willis Cooke are prominent. Some scholars, like P.C. Mazoomdar, William Torrey Harris, George Williamson, Suami Parmanand, Friederick Ives Carpenter, Harold Clarke Goddard and Arthur Christy have discussed in detail Emerson's literary relations with India. Recently Kenneth Walter Cameron, Man Mohan Singh, J.P. Rao Rayapati, K.K. Shukla and others have confirmed the presence of Indian ideas in Emerson's works in varying degrees.

Apart from this considerable body of external evidence, there is also internal evidence in support of our hypothesis that Emerson used Indian ideas as incorporated in the Gita in the formulation of his philosophical position. Since the very beginning of intellectual...
life, shaped as much by his circumstances as by mystic or spiritual bent of his mind, he was engaged in a serious battle with the canker not only inside his lungs, but also in his mind in the form of skepticism. Among many other things what he desired most, was a "victorious answer set down in impregnable propositions to the glazed lies of this Deceiver" i.e. the "Scotch Goliath, David Hume." If he did not embark upon his 'Eastward' voyage, immediately and wholeheartedly, it was presumably because he could not find out Rammohan Roy's Translation of the Ishopnishash, suggested by his ebullient aunt; and also because of his aversion, though mixed with fascination, to India, caused by his reading of some inaccurate and hostile accounts of the customs and manners of her people. For the time being he was content to squeeze the answer from the traditional sources, viz. Christian doctrines, the 'moral-sense' doctrines of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, the Ideal Theory of Berkeley and his own doctrine of Compensation. Even these doctrines, it can be suggested, were pregnant with Indian ideas. For example, it is on record that Emerson had read Grant's 'Restoration of Learning in the East', which attempted to draw a parallel between Hindu philosophy and Berkeley's idealism, before (i.e. in 1820) he wrote his prose fragment 'Ideal Theory', in 1821 or 1822 as dated by Rusk. In the same way, he drew heavily from Indian doctrine of Karma while shaping his theory of Compensation. For the influence of India on Christian dogmas and moral sense, we can refer to the second chapter of this dissertation.

2. CHRISTY, p. 283.
The seeds, which Indian ideas had sown, lay in, waiting for the season of germination to come. At last Aunt Mary and his growing idealism broke the crust of his aversion and turned it to fascination. Gradually India became a source of mystery and intellectual and spiritual food, a sustaining power and an instrument, which liberated him from provincialism and Christian superstition. Indian ideas gained strength by his subsequent reading. In 1826 he read Sampson Reed's 'Observations on the Growth of the Mind', proving that the divine and the human are united within — a notion, which closely ran parallel to Indian thought on the subject. During the late twenties, his faith in Christian dogmas was eroded. His faith in the Christian God, which helped him to recover emotionally from the serious illness of the winter of 1826, evaporated by 1839. His reading of Victor Cousin in 1831, among other things, supplied him with a very illuminating summary of the Gita, in thought and content. Then Ogerando and possibly Duperron also, provided his rich and authentic accounts of Indian philosophy. Now the commandment upon which he set his heart was 'Know Thyself'. — Selen's dictum which had Indian connections.

The clouds of revolt against Historical-Christianity, gathering over Emerson's mind, for quite some time, finally burst in the form of his refusal to conduct the ritual of Lord's Supper. No doubt that the arguments advanced were from Quaker books, but the moving force behind his action was something else. It was his spiritual

1. CONGER, p. 111.
discovery of the 'celestial host', in the heart of man. Later in The Over-Soul he declared that "the Highest dwells with him." It was the revelation that the soul is not "a spark or drop or breath or voice of God, it is God," it is the great God in His manifold aspects, — as Krishna has said: —

"The Supreme Spirit in the body is said to be the Witness, the Permitter, the Supporter, the Experiencer, the Great Lord and the Supreme Self." Upon this discovery of Emerson Whicher comments: —

"Such a thought was indeed, as he felt, revolutionary, both in his thought and in his spirit... The astonishing surge of pride and confidence that followed, however repugnant to Christians, is a genuine rebirth, and like all such unlocked-for spiritual unfoldings commands our respect and attention. In our literature only Whitman's better-publicized conversion rivals it in interest.

The fact that God lives in the heart of man is stated in the Gita over and over again Krishna emphatically asserts: —

"I...am the self seated in the hearts of all creatures." "And I am lodged in the hearts of all." "The Lord abides in the heart of all beings."

In 1833 Emerson came to discover another fundamental truth about human condition, that there are two selves: —

"I recognize the distinction of the outer and inner self of the double consciousness... that there are two selves... within this erring passionate mortal self sits a supreme calm immortal mind."

1. The Selected Writings, p. 276.
2. Whicher, p. 21.
7. B.G., XVIII, 61.
8. Emerson, quoted in Whicher, p. 22.
This knowledge formed the basis of Emerson's doctrine of double consciousness. The Gita too speaks of two selves, lower and higher:—

"When one has conquered one's self (lower) and has attained to the calm of self-mastery, his Supreme Self abides ever concentrated, he is at peace in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain in honour and dishonour."¹

Coleridge's distinction of the Reason and Understanding should not be supposed to be the basis of Emerson's discovery of the binary nature of man, because in nature and temperament they were poles apart:—

"...the contrast between his expanding self-reliance and Coleridge's unctuous churchliness warns us that Emerson was no man's disciple."²

Furthermore Coleridge's Reason is merely a door of access to God, where as Emerson's Reason is God. In the same way Plato and Plotinus cannot be supposed to be the bases of his notion, for his intensive reading in Plato and Neo-Platonism appears to belong more to the later 1830's and after.³ His acquaintance with the ideas of Fox and Swedenborg was not of much help, as we have seen earlier and his knowledge of Germanic-mysticism was then very slight and never grew large.⁴ Whicher thinks that Emerson arrived at this position independently:—

"When all allowance is made for resources, Emerson's position remains substantially a fresh insight of his own, whose nature he worked out initially by inspection without much regard to precedent."⁵

1. B.G., VI, 7.  
2. WHICHER, p. 19.  
5. WHICHER, p. 31.
Whicher's assertion confirms that the notion of the existence of God in the heart of man or 'self' is 'God within', has no precedent in the Western speculation. On the question of liberation also, Emerson deviated from the Christian position. He was not content merely with the discovery of 'moral sense'; he wanted an "assured salvation" instead. He believed:–

"to make contact with the supernatural Being is the greatest miracle and the only goal of life."1

Emerson remained a "believer in Unity, a seer of Unity" throughout his life. In 'The Over-Soul', he visualizes a unity between the subjective and the objective worlds. For him:–

"the act of seeing, the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object are one."2

The thought and phraseology of this statement runs closely parallel to that of the following verse of the Gita:–

"He is the Light of lights, said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the object of knowledge and the goal of knowledge — He is seated in the hearts of all."3

These observations confirm that Emerson was nearer to Hindu-thought especially to that of the Gita than to the Christian doctrines. Another belief of Emerson that self is the enemy of self, bears the stamp of the Gita. Once while dealing with his theory of Compensation, he approvingly quoted St. Bernard:–

1. WHICHER, p. 31.
2. The Selected Writings, p. 262.
"Nothing can work me damage except myself; the
harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never
am a real sufferer but by my own fault." 1

These words closely parallel the following utterances of Krishna—

"Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not
degrade himself; for the Self alone is the friend of
the self and the self alone is the enemy of the self." 2

Having formulated the broad outlines of his transcendental
philosophy of the Over-Soul, double-consciousness, Compensation,
salvation and having adopted an anti-historial instance, an attitude,
"common to all intuitional systems and to the Perennial philosophy" 3
such as the Bhagavad-Gita 4, he announced it through a series of
utterances and writings viz. The Lord's Supper (1832) Nature (1836)
The American Scholar (1837) and Divinity School Address (1838).
Emerson's discovery of the Self, continued to dominate his essays
especially The Over-Soul, Self-Reliance, Heroism, Intellect, etc.
The Essays added new dimensions to his old conception.

In Self-Reliance, discovering the true nature of the "self-
reliant soul" he taught us to live "wholly from within", and to
respect the laws of our nature, because our own law is the eternal
law; He said that the "inmost" and the "outmost" coincide in the
self; that the aboriginal self" in man is the source of all life
and all existence, that it is the foundation of action and of
thought; that the soul is the prime mover, the underlying unity,
and the immense intelligence in which we all share; and that it is

1. Quoted in Whitcher, p. 37.
2. B.G., VI, 5.
3. Cameron, p. 493.
the "universal mind", "the illimitable essence", and the principle of identity. In Compensation and The Over-Soul, developing this idea, further, he writes that the soul within man is above the relational existence, it is transcendental, the vast spiritual background and the substratum of all functions and states of consciousness. In American Scholar, he gives a mandate for knowing this self-luminous and self-effulgent light which illuminates the intellect and animates all organs and faculties. Many of these ideas can easily be detected in Cousin's summary of the Gita.

In 1837 Emerson developed the concept of the 'sakela' or 'the observer or witness', as the most important way to self possession. Let us refer to his journal-entry of the said year:

"The victory is won as soon as any Soul has learned always to take sides with Reason against himself; to transfer his Me from his person, his name, his interest, back upon Truth and Justice, so that when he is disgraced and defeated and fretted and disheartened, and wasted by nothing, he bears it well, never one instant relaxing his watchfulness, and, as soon as he can get a respite from the insults or the sadness, records all these phenomena, pierces their beauty as phenomena, and, like a God, observes himself...keep the habit of the observer, and, as fast as you can, break off your association with your personality and identify yourself with the Universe. Be a football to Time and Chance, the more kicks, the better, so that you inspect the whole game and know its uttermost law."

The 'observer' ('sakela') concept finds expression in the Gita at several places. We take two examples:

(1) "I am the goal, the Upholder, the Lord, the Witness........2
(2) The Supreme Spirit in the body is said to be the witness...3

1. Quoted in YU, p. 53.
2. B.G., IX, 18 (gater bharta prabhu sākai)
3. B.G., XIII, 22 (updrastā' numanta ca).
The verses from 54 to 72 of the second chapter of the Gita give a fine description of the state of Perfect sage i.e. sthitaprajna. The description of this state can be found in 'The Over-Soul' also. In the essay Emerson describes "the world" as "The perennial miracle which the soul worketh." Gradually Man learns that the Universe is "an atom, in a moment of time", and consequently understands that "all history is sacred." The dawning of this knowledge on his mind will help him to live in a divine unity and enable him "to render any service" in any place and front the morrow.1 Commenting on this aspect Dr. Shakuntala N. Gayatonde writes:–

"That the Enlightened Man, described by Emerson in the third part, bears a great resemblance to the sthitaprajna or yogi described by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, as he remains unperturbed in all circumstances in the world, lives with a divine unity and is capable of facing any hardship."2

As in the Gita we cannot draw a line between Atman and Brahman, in the same way we cannot draw a line of demarcation in Emerson, where the jurisdiction of the soul ends and that of the Over-Soul begins. This fact confirms how closely Emerson followed the Gita. According to William Torrey Harris and John Smith Harrison, even the word "Over-Soul" was coined by Emerson from the word 'adhyatman' of the Gita ("aksaram brahma param svabhavo dhyātman ugyate" VIII, 3). However Swami Parmananda finds it "almost a literal translation of

1. The Selected Writings, p. 278.
the Sanskrit word 'Param-Atman' (Supreme Self)."¹ This word also
occurs in the Gita several times.

The conception of individualism in "Self-Reliance" is
saturated with the ideas of the Gita. For Emerson's individualism
is neither the "rugged individualism" of Americans nor a "drab and
dread oneness" of the mystics,² but the 'blending' of the pragmatic
and the ideal, enabling us to hitch our wagon to a star without
going in the way of the barn door. 'Self-possession' i.e. the
spiritual state 'sthitaprajna' is the very core of Emersonian indi-
vidualism.³ Emerson's perfect individual is not one of many, "but
he is the one, and only."That, of course, is also the solution of
the problem of individuality in Indian thinking, the perfect expres-
sion of which is the Bhagavad-gita. It enjoins action but insists
on attitude and outlook."⁴ Arjuna, who fulfills his duties as a
soldier and man, acts as an individual, as one of many. After gaining
true insight, Arjuna does not come to believe that many are illusory.
He knows that the concept of many is pragmatically real but episte-
молogically conditional.

How such a man of true wisdom i.e. the hero keeps his self-
possession at the time of crisis or even at the time of death, has
been illustrated in the essay 'Hercism'. The vanquished Duke
Sophocles (Wisdom incarnate) and his wife Dorigen (virtue incarnate)
do not submit to their Roman conqueror Martius (Mars, or warfare)

¹. Swami Parmananda, Emerson and Vedanta, The Vedanta Centre, Boston,
Maas., Second edition, p. 65; hereafter referred to as a PARMANANDA.
². LEIDECKER, p. 42.
³. Ibid., p. 42.
⁴. Ibid., p. 42.
and Valerius (strength). They accept death calmly to the baffle-
ment of their executioners. The calm acceptance of duty, as
also of fate, is the message of the Gita too. Thus in 'Heroism'
Emerson follows the Gita still more closely. Carl Nelson says
that Emerson's

"mixture of heroics and wisdom puts one in mind specially
of the Bhagavat-Gita, a work, which fascinated Emerson."1

Nelson further states that Emerson overrides,

"the paradoxical figure of the traditional western mili-
tarist so as to uncover a new martial hero of the eternal
Self."2

For the hero, the 'war within' is more important than the 'war-without.'
Only the 'victory-within' can ensure the 'victory without.' Before
vanquishing his enemies Arjuna's higher Self had to conquer his
lower self. On his part Emerson says:-

"...the man within the breast assumes a war-like atti-
tude, and affirms his ability to cope single-handed with
the infinite army of enemies. To this military attitude
of the soul we give the name of Heroism."3

The 'war-inside' is to be fought with the sword of wisdom. "Heroism",
says Emerson, "is an obedience to a secret impulse of an individual
character."4 Etymologically 'secret' means to separate apart" and
'impulse' means "to drive on." Therefore the hero is one, like the
Prince Arjun, who is driven in and guided to the knowledge that

   XVIII, 4th Quarter, 1972, p. 260; hereafter referred to as NELSON.
2. NELSON, p. 260.
3. Emerson. Selected Writings, p. 252.
4. Ibid., p. 253.
separates his perishable body from the true and eternal Self," a type of knowledge which Sophocles, the duke of Athens and his wife possessed. The hero remains unperturbed in all conditions, at all times:

"The hero is a mind of such balance that no disturbances can shake his will... for the hero that thing he does is the highest deed and is not open to the censure of philosophers or divines." 2

Krishna asks Arjuna to treat emotional ups and downs alike:

"Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle...." 3

The first step of 'self-possession' is the identification of the place, where the Self is lodged. Both Emerson and the Gita agree that the abode of the Self is in the heart.

Emerson: "where the heart is, there the muses, there the gods sojourn." 4

Krishna: "I am .... the self seated in the hearts of all creatures." 5

Emerson's recipe for the attainment of 'self-possession's is the practice of asceticism:

"To speak the truth, even with some austerity, to live with some rigour of temperance, or some extremes of generosity, seems to be asceticism which common good-nature would appoint to those, who are at ease and in plenty, in sign that they feel a brotherhood with the great multitude of suffering men." 6

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1. NELSON, p. 268.
2. Emerson. Selected Writings, pp. 252-253.
4. Selected Writings, p. 256.
The Gita assigns a high place to austerity, so much so that Krishna identifies himself with it:—

"I am the life in all existences and austerity in ascetics."1

For the attainment of perfection the Gita prescribes the practice of asceticism. But asceticism is to be coupled with the spirit of the solidarity of the world. For Self-possession Emerson enjoins the hero to follow his own nature:—

"I see not any road of perfect peace which a man can walk, but after the counsel of his own bosom."2

The Gita also prescribes the same formula:—

"Better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. One does not incur sin when one does the duty ordained by one's own nature."3

Both Emerson and the Gita assert that the self is its own friend and its own enemy.

Emerson: "when the spirit is not master of the world, then it is its dupe"4

Krishna: "...the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self."5

Heroism according to Emerson is not a "posture, but a journey to fulfilment according to the dictates of the inner Self."6 It leads to wholeness in a "seeming" death. Emerson writes:—

2. Selected Writings, p. 259.
3. B.G., XVIII, 47 see also III, 8, 35 & XVIII, 43.
5. B.G., VI, 5.
6. NELSON, p. 263.
"And yet the love that will be annihilated sooner than treacherous has already made death impossible, and affirms itself no mortal but a native of the deeps of absolute and inextinguishable being."\(^1\)

Nelson thinks that the same appeal to eternal being appears at the end of the Bhagavad-Gita:–

"Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; prostrate thyself before Me; so shalt thou come to Me. I promise thee truly, for thou art dear to Me. Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils."\(^2\)

We have considered only the important essays. A close perusal of other essays will reveal that Emerson's conception of the Soul or the Over-Soul for that matter, runs close to that of the Gita. The same tendency can be witnessed in Emerson's conception of Nature, the outer-reality. It underwent an enlarging and deepening process culminating into a concept which was very much akin to that of the Gita. This new concept can be detected first in 'The Method of Nature' (1841) and 'Nature' (1844) and later on also in the second edition of his booklet 'Nature' and 'Country Life' (1858). The Nature of 1836, proved the primacy of the Self over Nature. In fact both Nature and God were absorbed by the Self. In the new formulation the central position was occupied by the 'outer-reality' and the Self was relegated to the secondary position. Whicher gives a fine comparative assessment of the two positions:–

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1. Selected Writings, p. 260.
"Originally he thought of the soul as within the self; nature was an exteriorization of this aboriginal Self, was even in a transcendental sense man's creation. Now, rather, he thought of the Soul as within nature, and of man as her late, if supreme, product. As a part of nature, man shared in the Soul; as the only conscious part of nature, he even had the special privilege to see and know the Soul within him; but he was no longer prior to or apart from the world around him. Emerson moved from a subjective toward an objective idealism."

The new conception, it is generally supposed, was the outcome of Emerson's growing interest in the theory of evolution, which propounded that life appeared after inorganic matter (i.e., consciousness appeared after matter) and that the higher life emerged from the lower life, showing a tendency of gradual ascent. This supposition sounds highly ridiculous in view of Emerson's known hostility to materialism, the philosophy of the scientists. It is true that Emerson believed in evolution but evolution for him was — "a series of events in a chronological sequence and not the transmutation of species by natural selection." His evolution was a spiritual evolution. It has been suggested that Emerson's adoption of the scholastic doctrine of 'natura naturata' (Visible Nature) and 'natura naturans' (Efficient Nature) was behind his new conception of nature. Though this conception solves Emerson's problem about the forms of nature — as a cause and as an effect —, it does not lead him to a unified vision in which Self, nature with its two forms and God merge into a single Unity. Emerson achieves this Unity only in the conception of all absorbing Brahman. Neither the theory of evolution, nor the scholastic doctrine of 'natura naturata' and 'natura

1. WHICHER, p. 141.
nature can fully explain all elements of Emerson's new notion; but the Gita can explain it comprehensively.

First we take the idea of 'growth', which Emerson is said to have adopted from evolution. This idea is implied in the concept of 'Brahma', for Brahma literally means 'to grow'. In the Gita, Brahma comes "to mean the totality of existence" including both the being and becoming. It is also "material Nature, the womb into which the personal God plants his seed.":

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

Originally Emerson thought of the Soul as within self, and nature, in a transcendental sense man's creation. Now he thought of the Soul as within nature and man as her product. Emerson's new position is fully commensurate with that of the Gita. In the Gita everything, 'conscious' or 'unconscious' ; moving or unmoving, is the product of nature:—

"Under My guidance, nature (prakrti) gives birth to all things moving and unmoving..."

In the Indian thought in general and the Gita in particular Soul, which in western thought means 'buddhi' or mind, is the product of Prakrti and not of the self or Purush. Furthermore the Gita speaks of two Prakrtis, the Lower and the Higher. Higher Prakrti produces conscious beings, whereas the Lower Prakrti produces unconscious things:—

1. ZAEHNER, p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 37.
3. B.G., XIV, 3.
4. B.G., IX, 10.
5. ZAEHNER, p. 22.
"Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind and understanding and self sense — this is the eightfold division of My nature. This is My lower nature. Know My other and higher nature, which is the soul; by which the world is upheld." \(^1\)

Hence man is not prior or apart from the world around him. He is a "part or parcel" of the Whole. Another new idea that man has the special privilege to see and know the Soul within him needs no special comment, for it is a position common to all schools of spiritualism. All these shreds of thought, which he infused in his new conception were available to him even before his access to the Gita i.e. in Cousin's provocative summary of the Gita.

The presence of the echoes of the Gita in Emerson's poems also supports our view that the fundamental ideas of the Gita, were known to Emerson before he wrote his seminal works and that he made full use of them in shaping his thought. The following examples will illustrate our point. First we take 'Sphinx,' a poem composed in 1841. Even Carpenter who suggests that "the Orient came much too late to play a direct role in shaping Emerson's philosophy," \(^2\) concedes that "The Sphinx" is very similar to the Bhagavad-Gita. According to Leyla Goren, "the poem has a certain Oriental flavour." \(^3\)

The poem deals with the basic energy of the world:—

\[
\text{I am thy spirit, yoke-fellow;}  
\text{Of thine eye I am eyebeam.}  
\text{She melted into purple cloud,}  
\text{She silvered in the moon;}
\]

1. B.G., VII, 4 & 5.  
2. YU, p. 27.  
3. LEYLA GOREN, p. 42.
She spired into a yellow flame;
She flowered in blossom red;
She flowed into a foaming wave;
She stood Monadnac's head.1

The thought which runs in these lines corresponds to the following
words of the Gita in form and content:—

"I am the taste in the waters, .... I am the light in
the moon and the sun. I am the syllable Aum in all the
Vedas; I am the sound in ether and manhood in man. I am
the pure fragrance in earth and brightness in fire. I am
the life in all existences and the austerity in ascetics."2

A similar vein is also visible in Woodnotes:—

"He is the essence that enquires.
He is the axis of the star;
He is the sparkle of the spar;
He is the heart of every creature;
He is the meaning of each feature;
And his mind is the sky."3

In this poem i.e. Woodnotes, we can also find Emerson's notion of
evolution and Transmigration.

"Onward and on, the eternal Pan,
Who layeth the world's incessant plan.
Halteth never in one shape,
But for ever doth escape,
Like wave or flame, into new forms
Of gem, and air, of plants, and worms."4

These lines make an interesting comparison with the following
extract from Victor Cousin's summary of the Gita:—

1. Selected Prose and Poetry, pp. 359, 60.
3. Quoted in WHICHER, p. 152.
4. Ibid., p. 152.
"A perpetual and eternal energy has created all which you see and renew it without cessation. What is today a man, was yesterday a plant, and tomorrow may become a plant once more. The principle of everything is eternal."1

Another prominent idea of the Gita – that the man, who has attained equal-mindedness (the state of sthitaprajna), sees everybody with equal eyes, finds expression in Emerson's essays and poems alike. The Gita says :-

"Sages see with an equal eye, a learned and humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant or even a dog or an outcaste."2

Emerson writes in Woodnotes :-

Alike to him the better, the worse, –
The glowing angel, the outcaste corse.3

For the man of equanimity dualities and distinctions lose their meanings. He attains a state :-

Where good and ill,
And joy and mean
Melt into one.4 (The Celestial Love)

The Gita refers to the man, who has attained this state, time and again :-

"He who (behaves) alike to foe and friend, also to good and evil repute and who is alike in cold and heat, pleasure and pain...."5

Overcoming the sense of distinction and duality, the man of balanced mind perceives the underlying unity of all things. In Plato Emerson declares :-

1. Quoted in CAMERON, p. 578.
2. B.G., V, 18.
3. Quoted in WHICHER, p. 152.
5. B.G., XII, 18.
"The Same, the Same: Friend and foe are of one stuff; the ploughman, the plough and the furrow are of one stuff; and the stuff is such and so much that the variations of form are unimportant."¹

However, no single work of Emerson proves his indebtedness to the Gita more than his 'Brahma', a marvel, incorporating the quintessence of Emerson's final philosophical position. In the poem, Emerson freely used the ideas of the Gita, along with its plan, imagery and style to give in mere sixteen lines the self-portrait of his Deity — "a feet rather equal to a sixteen verse treatment of the character of Christ in the New Testament."² The philosophical and religious ideas of the poem, packed in paradoxes have baffled the "pandeests" of philosophy and literature alike, ever since its publication in 1837, in the first number of the 'Atlantic Monthly'. Nevertheless it was, its creator's favourite so much so that risking everything, he insisted upon retaining the poem "in his 'Selected Poems' of 1876, whatever else had to go."³

'Brahma' is planned on the lines of the Gita. The poet attempts to remove man's ignorance about his true Self, which is really Brahman. Then he lifts the veil of 'maya' or illusion which covers 'Brahma'. In the end Emerson like the Gita deals with the attainment of the abode of Brahman. The controversy — whether the title word 'Brahma' means Brahman, the first god of the Hindu Trinity or Brahman, the highest reality of Vedanta — should not detain us; for

¹. The Selected Writings, p. 476.
². Donald Ross, Jr. Emerson's "Brahma", ESO, No. 39, 1Ind Quarter, 1965, p. 43.
³. YU, p. 39.
the Concordians "often used several forms for the same word." 

They used both Brahma and Brahman to denote the highest deity of the Hindus. Undoubtedly by Brahma Emerson meant Brahman; for Brahma is too small to fit in the transcendental mould of Emerson's poetic creation. Even the term Brahman is inappropriate, in so far as it connotes, a reality without personality. Emerson's use of the First Person Singular and his making Brahman as the object of worship conclusively prove that "Brahma" is not Brahman. Another term Iśvara, God with personality, is also inadequate, for Iśvara is conditioned by 'maya'. Only the Gita-concept of 'Purusottama' can accommodate most of the notions, which Emerson intends to pack in "Brahma", for Purusottama towers over Brahman and Iśvara in the Gita. Nevertheless an allowance should be made for a distinct Emersonian flavour in the concept of Brahma, as he invariably introduces some adjuncts from the Western speculation. Emerson intended to make his Brahma a bridge between the Orient and the Occident. In this sense "Brahma" is the final and/or improved version of 'The Over-Soul'.

The poem opens with a paradox — "If the red slayer think he slays/Or if the slain Think he is slain." This notion of the self springs from man's ignorance; for the Self neither slays nor is slain. Emerson's source for the idea and phraseology is threefold the 'Vishnu Purana', the 'Gita' and the 'Katha Upanishad'. In 1845 he read and copied the following passage from the 'Vishnu Purana':

1. CHRISTY, p. XIV.
2. Selected Prose and Poetry, p. 433. All quotations from Brahma are from this source.
"What living creature slays or is slain? What living creature preserves or is preserved? Each is his own destroyer, as he follows evil or good."1

He rendered these lines into verse :-

What creature slayeth or is slain?
What creature saves or saved is?
His life will either lose or gain,
As he shall follow harm or bliss."2

Perhaps in the same year, he also read the following verse of the Gita :-

"The man who believeth that it is the soul which killeth, and he who thinketh that the soul may be destroyed are both alike deceived; for it neither killeth, nor is it killed."3

Then in 1856, Emerson read the Katha Upanishad which contained the following lines :-

"If the red-slayer think that he slays, if the slain think that he is slain, neither of them knows the truth, The Self slays not, nor is he slain."4

A comparative analysis of the sources will reveal that Emerson possibly seized upon the idea minus its moralistic tone, from the 'Vishnu Puran' whereas he received the immediate inspiration and phraseology from the 'Katha Upanishad.' The Gita provided him the proper context and its philosophical depth. The phrase 'the red-

2. Ibid., p. 117.
3. Ibid., II, 19; Wilkins' rendering, quoted by Carpenter in 'Immortality from India, American Literature, Vol. I, p. 235.
4. Quoted in MCLEAN, p. 117.
slayer of the stanza has rightly been identified... i.e. "Siva the Destroyer" by K.R. Chandrasekharan.

After exposing man's ignorance about the nature of Brahma as the Self (Interestingly the first title of the poem was 'Song of the Soul') Emerson switches on to reveal the "subtle ways" of Brahma — "They know not well the subtle ways." Carpenter finds the parallels of these phrases in — "they do not know well" and "The soul being more subtle than what is subtle" — which Emerson copied in his Journals from the Upanishads. The next line — "I change and pass and turn again" elaborates some of the subtle or the mysterious ways of Brahma, the eternal creative energy. The following lines from Cousin's summary of the Gita make a very interesting comparison:—

"A perpetual and eternal energy has created all which you see and renew it without cessation. What is today a man was yesterday a plant, and tomorrow may become a plant once more." 3

The Gita describes the creative process in the following words:—

"All beings... pass into nature, which is My own at the end of the cycle; and at the beginning of the (next) cycle, I send them forth." 4

In the second stanza, Emerson employs carefully chosen images to illustrate that Brahma eludes the categories of philosophy, religion and ethics. In 'Far and Forget to me is near', Far denotes

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2. CARPENTER, Immortality From India, p. 236.
3. CAMERON, p. 578.
distance in Space and 'Forgot', distance in Time. Brahma, being both 'far' and 'near' is beyond the categories of Time and Place. The Gita has an exact parallel to this paradox:—

"...He is too subtle to be known. He is far away and yet is He near."1

In the line "shadow and sunlight are the same", Emerson uses the sensuous images of 'shadow' and 'sunlight' to point out that Brahma is in one sense the subject to senses and in the other it is not. Likewise the Gita points out:—

"He appears to have the qualities of all the senses and yet is without (any of) the senses...."2

"The vanished gods to me appear" — this assertion implies that the gods of all religions — living or dead (vanished) appear before Brahma in submission. This idea is also reflected in the Gita:—

"In thy body, O God, I see all the gods...."3
"Yonder hosts of gods enter Thee and some, in fear, extol Thee with folded hands."4

The line — "And one to me are shame and fame" refers to moral categories. Good deeds bring fame and bad deeds, 'shame'. Brahma is beyond this duality. This assertion can also be traced to the Gita:—

"He holds equal blame and praise"5
"....fame and ill-fame (are) the different states of beings, which proceeds from Me alone."6

5. B.G., XII, 19.
In the first three lines of the third stanza, Emerson uses the form and imagery of the Gita to clothe western ideas. He seems to have found "impregnable propositions" to answer the doubts raised in Emerson's mind by the philosophy of David Hume. Emerson asserts that sceptics are wrong in leaving God out of their purview ("They reckon ill, who leave me out") for the intellect, which provides the arguments to refute the existence of God is itself the creation of God ("When me they fly, I am the wings"). This fact exposes the hollowness of their arguments. Brahma is a totality, which includes the doubter and his doubt ("I am the doubter and the doubt"). Brahma is not only the subject of the atheist's arguments, but also of the theist's praises contained in the scriptures. ("And I the hymn the Brahmin sings"). The phraseology of these assertions can easily be traced to the Gita:

"I am the intelligence of the intelligent" 1
"Of those who debate I am the dialectic" 2
"He is... knowledge, the object of knowledge and the goal of knowledge" 3
"I am the (sacred) hymn." 4

The last stanza, being essentially religious in tone, has an unmistakable stamp of the Gita. The lines - "The strong gods pine for my abode/And pine in vain the sacred Seven", - prove the futility of the powers of 'gods' and that of the perfections of the 'yogis' (the greatest of them) to attain the abode of Brahma. Only the man, who is meek, and loves goodness can attain that abode ("But

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1. B.G., VII, 10.
2. B.G., X, 32.
4. B.G., IX, 16.
thou seek lover of the good") on the condition that he leaves the worship of gods and the love of heaven and tries to find Brahma ("Find me and turn thy back on heaven"). These ideas can easily be spotted in the Gita, which also suggests the futility of worshipping minor gods:

"Worshipper of the gods go to the gods...those, who sacrifice to Me come to Me."¹

"Neither the hosts of gods nor the great sages know any origin of Me for I am the source of the gods and the great sages in every way."²

Emerson's advice that the devotee must look to God alone is also paralleled by the Gita:

"Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me...Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils."³

"The strong gods" can also be identified in the following verse of the Gita:

"Thou art Vayu (the wind), Yama (the destroyer), Agni (the fire), Varuna (the sea-god) and Sašanka (the moon) and Prajapati, the grandsire (of all)."⁴

The Gita also refers to "the sacred Seven:

"The seven great sages of old, and the four Manus are of My nature...."⁵

Leyla Goren believes that the idea of 'sacred Seven' might have been suggested to Emerson by "Freemasonry in ancient Egypt."⁶ It is also

1. E.G., IX, 25.
2. E.G., X, 2.
5. E.G., X, 6.
6. LEYLA GOREN, p. 52.
interesting to note that Greece too had her Seven sages, the
chief being Thales, Bias, Pittacus and Solon. However Emerson's
indebtedness to either of these sources in the concept of "the
sacred Seven" cannot be ascertained. The phrase "meek lover of
the good" means that one, who identifies oneself with the good
and thus finds heaven, while those who believe they know the
exclusive way, must necessarily fail.

Emerson's singular achievement in 'Brahma' lies in the
fact, that he is able to give the poem several dimensions in that
it can be interpreted in the Western light also. Perry Miller
asserts that it is not the "rendition of anything in the Bhagavad-
Gita; it is New England's old Puritanism decked out in Oriental
imagery." On the other hand H. H. Waggoner contends that the poem
contains Emerson's intuitions derived from the Medieval and Renais-
sance tradition of negative theology." It is no wonder that Emerson
suggested his confused daughter to replace the title-word 'Brahma'
by Jehovah. In the last stanza, there is an implied suggestion of
God's 'grace' for salvation, a characteristic element of Christian
mythology. Interestingly Krishna and Christ agree upon the neces-
sity of Grace for salvation. Krishna assures Arjuna:

"By His grace shall thou obtain supreme and eternal
abode."
Emerson, thus achieved, what he most desired the East-West synthesis in 'Brahma'.

Suami Paramananda believes that "Emerson fully recognized the loftiness and beauty of the Eastern teaching. He also possessed an unusual grasp of Indian philosophy."¹ Like the mythical Indian swan, he picked up relevant Indian ideas to mingle with his own. It can be added that even among the Indian sources the Gita had a major share in carving Emerson's final notions of God, Soul, Karma, Maya, etc. If we see, in retrospect, we shall find, that he reached his concept of 'Brahma' rather slowly. He started with the Christian conception of God as a Person; but by 1822, he became intrigued with the Pythagorean doctrine of 'anima mundi' (World Soul) "into which the soul of the individual was absorbed and afterwards emanated again."² He got its confirmation in Plato and in the doctrine of Moral Law. Then after his acquaintance with the Hindu 'Atman' and the Neoplatonic "All-Soul"³, by 1841, Emerson developed his own doctrine of the Over-Soul. More studies of the Indian scriptures, especially of the Gita led him to his conception of Brahma, his final word on Deity.

In the matter of the individual Soul, Emerson began with his usual Christian notion of the Soul as a unique creation of God. However he felt that:

"The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul."⁴

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1. PARMANANDA, p. 20.
2. Quoted in YU, p. 30.
3. CAMERON, p. 47.
4. The Selected Writings, p. 262.
Dr. Shakuntala N. Gayatonde, has made a good analysis of the elements of Emerson's final conception. The Soul is "a Being, devoid of negation and bearing all relations and parts within itself;" it "refuses all limits"; it is "sometimes a manifestation of the Deity"; "proceeding from within outward, it enlarges its circles ever" and it "is embodied and the body is wholly ensouled." In a passage Emerson states that the soul within Man is the Soul of the whole, the Universal Beauty the Eternal one, the Embodiment of Perfection, devoid of all distinctions such as seer, object, spectacle." The Soul is the "Inner Light" and "Creator of the useful and the beautiful." but for such creation the individual mind must be submitted to the universal mind. Dr. Gayatonde concludes that:

"A critical study of Emerson's treatment of the Soul indicates that his theory conforms to the visistadvaita, where the Supreme Being is in the embodied form of a Deity, and at the same time is endowed with the Eternal Oneness (Advaita) of the Vedantins."

It is noteworthy that the Gita also holds the same position.

Between God and Soul stands 'maya'. Emerson adopted the Hindu doctrine in its twin aspects: 'maya' as an instrument of concealment in the form of ignorance and illusion, and 'maya', in the form of 'prakrti' as a creative energy. In the former aspect it helps Brahma in creation. Emerson formulated his

1. GAYATONDE, p. 112.
2. Quoted in GAYATONDE, p. 112.
3. GAYATONDE, p. 112.
4. Ibid., p. 112.
principle of creation on the lines suggested by the Gita. The following lines of his poem "Woodnotes" give an account of his theory:

"Ever fresh and broad creation,
A divine improvisation,
From the heart of God proceeds,
A single will, a million deeds."

It is actually Brahma, who produces the music of creation:

"O what are heroes, prophets, men,
But pipes through which the breath of Pan does blow
A momentary music."

Another poetic expression of this idea occurs in the 'Three Dimensions.' The 'One' enters into variety, just as Brahma projects itself into various worlds of 'maya':

"Room, room, willed the opening mind,
And found it in Variety."

This theory of creation as emanation is neither Hebraic nor Aristotelian; it is Vedantic, having its echoes in Neo-platonists, Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart, Tauler etc. However Emerson differs from the Vedantists in that he tries to frame a law into a doctrine of causal agency or free will, as the basis for his doctrine of Self-Reliance. Emerson's theory is different from the theory of Evolution, in the sense that in Emerson the method of advance is perpetual transformation and not scientific evolution, envisaged by Darwin.

1. Quoted in CHRISTY, p. 179.
2. Quoted in LEYLA GOREN, p. 42.
3. Quoted in CHRISTY, p. 98.
Man is a "divine improvisation." He contains in him two elements, those of higher nature (Self) and lower nature (body). It implies that on the metaphysical plane, he is pure consciousness, whereas on the phenomenal plane, he is consciousness plus body. On the basis of this binary nature of man, Emerson frames his doctrine of 'double-consciousness,' a doctrine, which enables him to overcome his dilemma of Reason and Understanding, of the ideal and the real; of the heaven and the earth and of eternity and time. This doctrine, being truly transcendental, was faithfully followed by Thoreau and Whitman and even by Melville and Poe. Here again the hand of the Gita is clearly visible, for in the Gita the phenomenal bipolarity of man is a familiar idea. Furthermore the double vision of the Gita — the individual and the cosmic, induces Emerson to have a universal outlook, which helps him to develop the spirit of detachment. Anyhow this doctrine is beyond the comprehension of those, who are nurtured in the philosophy of dualism and for whom, body 'the sinful clay' is the legacy of Satan. Prof. Gray's statement is the expression of this bafflement:—

"Man cannot "belong" in one kind of existence and "be" in another...for it leaves an impossible dualism in the nature of man."2

Arthur Christy's explanation of this paradox is that man does not belong to two realms:—

1. YU, p. 35.
2. GRAY, p. 43.
It is the veil before all mortal eyes which creates the seeming paradox of man belonging to one realm and being in another.1

The Westerners also found fault with Emerson’s doctrine of evil. Emerson did not believe in the ultimate reality of evil. He did not believe in the reality of pain either, although he did not deny the existence of pain as a phenomenon i.e. as a human experience. Another doctrine, which forged Emerson’s strong links with Hindus, but which at the same time made him unpopular among the Christians, is his doctrine of automatic moral compensation for the governance of this world. Emerson believes that man’s character is the maker of his fate. Seen in this light, fate is “nothing but the deeds committed in a prior state of existence.”2 This doctrine can be said to be of native origin in so far as its seeds were sown by his mother Ruth Emerson. But light and heat to it were provided by the Hindu thought. When in 1823, Emerson’s mind was over-whelmed with the questions of ‘good and evil’ and the “fate of slave”, he wrote to his aunt Mary for answers. She rather suggested to him to read Hindus, for she did not find satisfactory answers to these questions in Christian theology. Emerson formulated this theory during two years, spent with his brother William as a teacher. As Emerson grew old, he rejected the Greek interpretation of fate as too easy going:—

“The Indian system is full of fate, the Greek not.”3

1. CHRISTY, p. 97.
Later on Emerson became interested in the Mohammedan doctrine of 'Kismet', oblivious of the fact that it was really the Hebraic doctrine in disguise, for 'Kismet' is nothing but the autocratic decrees of Allah and Calvin's God. In Hindu Karma man reaps what he sows and he does not suffer for the misdeeds of others. In Christian doctrine one does, as Christ suffered for others. Another significant difference is that Christianity considers the individual in society, whereas the Karmic theory considers the individual alone. There is another significant difference between the doctrine of Karma and that of Compensation. 'Karma' is "inseparable" from the doctrine of Transmigration, whereas "this doctrine cannot be regarded as a matter of belief with Emerson."\(^\text{1}\) In his treatment of Transmigration he was half serious and half humorous. Emerson found that the Gita and the Upanishads approved of his own theory. Both Karma and Compensation were the consequences of very similar attitudes towards the World and the Over-Soul — both being the laws of the conservation of moral energy as well as of physical energy in a world, where there is nothing uncertain or capricious. In the final estimate, it can be said that "Emerson gave intellectual assent to the Hindu doctrine and practical expression to the Christian ethic."\(^\text{2}\)

If this doctrine — the doctrine of Compensation enabled Emerson to meet the uncontrollable ups and downs of his spirit and taught him the indifference of circumstances, another doctrine that of identity, led him to establish an original relation with

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1. CHRISTY, p. 105
2. CHRISTY, p. 102
the universe and enjoy ecstatic moments. This philosophy of mind first propounded in 'Nature' envisages the unity of philosophy and religion, the use of knowledge for transformation and release via enlightenment. It is based on the fundamental unity of the world, the sole test of which being the authentic experience of the individual. In Nature, Emerson reintegrated, God, man, mind and matter once for all on the common matrix of nature. The truth of this union he verified by his own perception, which he referred to as "a certain wondering light", "certain moments" and as "a certain brief experience." This unification, Emerson believes, is assured, because of the "invincible tendency of the mind" to unify. The union assured in those moments of mystical ecstasy attests to the inexhaustible richness of every moment. "All that ever was is now." This leads Emerson to shape his doctrine of 'Here and Now', in answer to his question, "How shall I live?" Living requires a certain skill. Emerson suggests this skill in his famous metaphor of 'skating' — skating or gliding across the bottomless depths of reality. This art of life, which certainly is open to free choice, thus becomes a necessity. In this way Emerson reconciles freedom and necessity in terms of his doctrine of the Here and the Now. Here too Emerson echoes the Gita, which suggests the necessity of liberation, for which the path of yoga has been suggested. The yoga is the skill in doing work, but for the choice everybody is free.

1. Quoted in YU, p. 35.
2. Quoted in YU, p. 35.
4. B.G., XVIII, 63.
Emerson was not merely a thinker; but he was a man, who strove to give a practical shape to what he believed. As he was a believer in 'Unity', he aspired to experience Unity, and when he was not successful in his attempt it was woes to him. In such a frustrated mood once he lamented:

"A believer in Unity, a seer of Unity, I yet behold two." 2

Technically this experience of Unity is called mysticism. "Emerson was no mystic, except in the very loosest sense." 2 He considered himself to be a 'poet' in theory and practice. It is true, for Emerson did not make mysticism his career; he never thought to become hermit or to leave Concord, for practising Yoga or anything of the like. Nevertheless, his works are full of such accounts, which point out that he had mystic experiences, which completely transformed his life. Once he noted:

"Every man has had one or two moments of extraordinary experience, has met his soul, has thought of something, which he never afterwards forgot, and which revised all his speech, and moulded all his forms of thought." 3

In his booklet 'Nature' Emerson refers to such a catalytic experience:

"Standing on the bare ground - my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space - all mean egotism vanishes, I become a transparent eyeball; I see nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." 4

1. Quoted in YU, p. 34.
2. WELLEK, p. 191.
3. Quoted in YU, p. 33.
4. The Selected Writings, p. 6.
Patrick F. Quinn employs his profound critical acumen to expose the limitations of this passage as a mystic experience, oblivious of the fact that mystic experiences, however meticulously articulated cannot stand intellectual scrutiny. A mystic experience can be described only by symbols and suggestions, which can be interpreted only by those, who themselves have the benefit of such an experience. Anne Fremantle has given us some very interesting examples of Emerson's mystic experiences, as recorded in his works.1

After undergoing a mystic experience man does not remain what he was. Emerson's life was also completely transformed. From a mediocre boy, he grew into a catalyst of the most creative period of American literature and philosophy and from an impulsive and emotional adolescent, to a man of perfect equanimity. Van Wyck Brooks says that for ten years he lived in the House of Pain-illness (tuberculosis rheumatic pains and failure of the eyes) frustration, false beginning, calamity and confusion. But gradually he learned to climb up those regions of his mind, up to which the clouds of passions do not rise. He tells us in his essay "The Tragic" (1844) that "All sorrow dwells in a low region.....in the appearance and not in things."2 Previsouly he was given to extreme emotions. He was so much shocked by the death of his first wife Ellen that he became cynical. He wrote 1:-

"There is one birth, and one baptism, and one first love."3

2. Quoted in YU, p. 35.
3. Quoted in YU, p. 35.
Once an uncontrollable impulse compelled him to open Ellen's coffin. On another occasion he laughed at his brother Charles' grave. But after mystical experiences, he became a complete master of himself, so much so that he bore the loss of the dearest thing of his life i.e. his son the little Waldo with stoic calmness. He spoke of his death as "a beautiful estate — no more." Thereafter, throughout his life, he lived like the sage, like the "sthitasprajna" of the Gita. Even in those days, when his grip on the mind was loose, he remained true to his convictions and refused to submit to his wife Lydian's determined effort to persuade and pressurize him to declare his allegiance to Church. Aphasia did not stop him to express his regrets for the trouble he was giving to others. He lived in the world like a yogi or like a lotus-flower in water, as the Gita says:-

"He who works, having given up attachment, resigning his actions to God, is not touched by sin, even as a lotus (is untouched) by water."

In the crowd, he enjoyed himself the bliss of solitude as Thomas Chalmesdeley wrote to Thoreau :-

"The lonely man is a diseased man, I greatly fear. See how carefully Mr. Emerson avoids it; and yet who dwells, in all essentials, more religiously free than he?"

Like a saint Emerson had a unique mystic effulgence, which charmed every body, who came within its radius. Even those who did not understand even a single word of his utterances felt the impact of his spiritual halo. Once a maid-servant, on being asked

1. B.G., V, 10.
2. Quoted in PORTE, p. 94.
why she should so strongly desire to hear Emerson, replied that she liked the tall and stately figure of Emerson speaking. His words whether written or spoken caused the vibrations which can be heard all the world over. Pure intellectuals would not get at the meaning of his words. To some of them, he would seem to be a "fraud" and a "sentimentalist." But to "those who would live in
the spirit," he is a "friend and aider."¹ Like Krishna of the Gita, Emerson fused in his life the seemingly contradictory elements of pragmatism and Transcendentalism.

¹. Matthew Arnold, quoted in PORTE, p. 190.