CHAPTER 5

'THE HERMIT OF WALDEN'

Henry David Thoreau's response to the Oriental classics, especially to the Indian scriptures was unprecedented. In the words of William Ellery Channing, his close companion for years, "...no one relished the 'Bhagvat Geeta' better, or the good sentences from the 'Vishnu Purana.' He loved the 'Laws of Menu', the Vishnu Sarma, Saadi, and similar books."\(^1\) The sentences of the 'Laws of Menu' "elevated" him "upon the tableland of the Ghauts" and extracts of the Vedas rose on him "like the full moon.\(^2\) He received from these ancient books a deep spiritual warmth and an inspiration to transform his life-style, in accordance with the "principles, learned in the school of the East\(^3\), of which these were the principal texts. Thoreau was practically swept off his feet by the Gita, so much so that he exclaimed in Walden:

"How much more admirable the Bhagvat-Geeta, than all the ruins of the East!"\(^4\)

'The Song of Bhagavat' seized upon his imagination for its sanity, sublimity, wisdom, common sense, pragmatism and universality. Thoreau valued this spiritual marvel, over and above, not only the Oriental classics but also the Occidental classics including the Bible and the works of Shakespeare. He writes:\(^-\)

1. Quoted in YU, p. 42.
2. A WEEK, p. 120.
4. WALDEN, p. 64 (Chapter I)
"The Bhagvat-Geeta is less sententious and poetic, perhaps, (than the Hymn of Praise) but still more wonderfully sustained and developed. Its sanity and sublimity have impressed the minds even of soldiers and merchants. It is characteristic of great poems that they will yield of their sense in due proportion to the hasty and the deliberate reader. To the practical they will be common sense, and to the wise wisdom; as either the traveller may use his lips, or an army may fill its water-casks at a full stream." 1

In the eyes of Thoreau the Gita belonged to "The noon-tide philosophy of India", "the better part of our thought." As Emerson used the dialogues of Krishna and Arjuna to liberate himself from the cultural provincialism, Thoreau too, used them for his mental purification:

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions." 2

According to Thoreau, before the philosophical brilliance of the Gita, even the wisdom of Shakespeare pales into insignificance:

"Beside the vast and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green and practical merely." 3

A high praise indeed by a New Englander! Thoreau preferred the Gita even to the Bible, the most prized book for Westerners:

"The New Testament is remarkable for its pure morality; the best of the Hindoo Scripture, for its pure intellectual. The reader is no where raised into and sustained in a higher, purer, or rarer region of thought than in the Bhagvat-Geeta." 4

1. A WEEK, p. 119.
2. WALDEN, pp. 240-241 (Chapter XVI).
In a letter to N.B. Willey, Thoreau counts the Gita, among the best books, he could think of. In 'A Week', he recommends it as a "good book, which deserves to be read with reverence even by Yankees"\(^1\), presumably because it meets their seemingly contradictory demands of spiritualism and pragmatism. He thinks that even Hebrews should profit by it in as much as there are parallels between it and the Bible, a book of moral grandeur and sublimity. Having a firm conviction in the eternal value of the Gita, he approvingly quotes the prophetic words of Warren Hastings incorporated, in his introduction to Wilkins' translation of the Gita:

"(It) will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist."\(^2\)

It is no wonder that the book, which extracted so much admiration from Thoreau, "sent deep down into his consciousness and gave him a new birth."\(^3\) Naturally it became one of the two books (the other being Emerson's 'Nature'), which served as catalysts in moulding his life and literary personality. It became a model and a source-book for countless explicit and implicit quotations, expressions, images, metaphors, arguments and cardinal principles of life, which found expression in in his spiritual biographies, A Week and Walden.

Ellen M. Raghavan and Barry Wood think that the Bhagavad Gita is "the most accessible of Thoreau's Hindu sources."\(^4\) A vigorous attempt has been made to identify Thoreau's borrowings from various

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1. A WEEK, p. 115.
3. CANTY, p. 199.
4. Ellen M. Raghavan and Barry Wood; Thoreau’s Hindu Quotations in A Week, American Literature, Vol. LI, March 1979, No.1, p. 96.
sources, including the Gita. A commendable effort in this direction has been made by Ernest E. Leisy.\footnote{Ernest E. Leisy; Sources of Thoreau’s Borrowings in A Week, American Literature, Vol. XVIII, 1946, pp. 37-44.} Raghavan and Wood have identified as many as twenty-nine quotations from the text and three quotations from the introductory letter of Warren Hastings to Wilkins’ translation, the book which Thoreau had studied. It is important to note that the bulk of these quotations came from Chapters II, III and IV, as is evident from the list:

\begin{itemize}
  \item p. 68 “God is the letter...Khu” The Veda, p. 12.
  \item p. 98 “There are the ...another?” Geeta, pp. 54-55 (IV, 28, 31).
  \item p.128 “Time drinketh up...execution” Hecatopades, p. 151.
  \item p.140 “Immemorial custom...law” Menu, p. 80.
  \item p.140 “Perform the settled...inaction” Geeta, p. 45 (III, 8).
  \item p.140 "A man’s own...smoke" Geeta, p. 131 (XVIII, 48).
  \item p.140 “The man who...himself” Geeta, p. 48 (III, 26).
  \item p.140 “Wherefore, O Arjuna...fight” Geeta, p. 36 (II, 37).
  \item p.142 “Of a sublimity...unequalled” Geeta, p. 10.
  \item p.142 “Will survive when...remembrance” Geeta, p. 13.
  \item p.143 “To those who...own” Geeta, p. 7.
  \item p.144 “The forsaking of works...lost” Geeta, p. 51 ("The forsaking of works" is a title added by Wilkins to Chapter 4 of the Geeta; the rest of the quotation is from IV, 2).
  \item p.144 “In wisdom is...exception” Geeta, p. 55 (IV, 33b).
  \item p.144 “Although thou wert...wisdom” Geeta, p. 55 (IV, 36).
  \item p.144 “There is not...purity” Geeta, p. 56 (IV, 38).
  \item p.144 “The action stands...wisdom” Geeta, p. 40 (II, 49a).
  \item p.144 “is confirmed...purposes” Geeta, p. 41 (II, 50).
  \item p.144 “Children only...other” Geeta, p. 57 (V, 4-5).
\end{itemize}

\footnote{RAGHAVAN AND WOOD, pp. 96-98.}
p. 144 "The man enjoyeth... event" Geeta, pp. 44-45 (III, 4-7).

p. 145 "Let the motive... inaction" Geeta, p. 40 (II, 47).

p. 145 "For the man... Supreme" Geeta, p. 46 (III, 19).

p. 145 "He who may... nothing" Geeta, p. 53 (IV, 18-20).

p. 145 "He is both... action" Geeta, p. 62 (VI, 1).

p. 145 "He who enjoyeth... Supreme" Geeta, p. 55 (IV, 31).

p. 146 "I am the same... hatred" Geeta, p. 81 (IX, 29).

p. 146 "Formed upon the... Sastra" Geeta (II, 39).

p. 146 "Seek an asylum... alone" Geeta, p. 40 (II, 49b).

p. 146 "hath to do" Geeta, p. 46 (III, 19: see above, Week, 145).

p. 146 "action" Geeta, Chapa. II-VI. The place of "action" of karma relative to "discipline" or yoga is a central theme of the Geeta, especially in these chapters from which most of Thoreau's are taken.

p. 146 "settled functions" Geeta, p. 45 (III, 8: see above, Week, p. 140).

p. 146 "a man's own religion" Geeta, p. 48 (III, 35).

p. 146 "a man's own particular calling" Geeta, p. 131 (XVIII, 47).

p. 146 "natural duty... field" Geeta, pp. 56, 130 (IV, 42; XVIII, 43).

p. 147 "walketh but... awake" Geeta, p. 43 (II, 69).

p. 147 "As, 0 mighty... beBief" Geeta, p. 135 (XVIII, 76-78).

Thoreau is motivated to quote so profusely from the Gita, presumably because of a strong desire to educate the reading public in the values of Oriental scriptures of which the pages of The Dial bear a glowing testimony. Extracts from the Gita "may have been gathered for use in another instalment of "Ethical Scriptures, a projected world bible quoting chiefly ethical and metaphysical beliefs East and West." Thoreau may have been led to publish these quotations in 'A Week', either because of the reduction in

1. NAGLEY, p. 311, footnotes.
the size of "The Dial" or because of its dissolution in 1844. These quotations are a token of Thoreau's genuine love and warmth for Oriental wisdom, a love, which, in any case, is not a product of an antiquarian predilection as Seybold thinks, but it is the product of his genuine desire to explore the realms of truth. The keenness of his desire is confirmed by the fact that on the basis of the translation, which suffers from all the limitations of the first venture, and without the benefit of any commentary or any explanatory material, he has gained an amazing insight into the doctrines, incorporated in the book. In this respect he leaves his mentor Emerson far behind. D.F. Mercer is quite right in her observation:-

"His analysis of The Bhagavad Gita, although somewhat influenced by an American love of tangible results, has a keenness, and his final word a depth, that Emerson did not always achieve..... Without a knowledge of Sankara, most subtle commentator on the Gita, Thoreau penetrates into and expresses his admiration for the religious philosophy....."2

Thoreau's analysis of the Gita, is undoubtedly "keen and one of the best in modern literature."3

Thoreau's fascination for the Gita has roots in his nature, a fine blending of the elements of action and contemplation. Naturally he is attracted by the Gita, because it caters to both the active and the contemplative needs of his being. Any how he approaches the book not with the spirit of devotion but with that of criticism. Thoreau is prepared to postpone every work to hear this

1. NAGLEY, p. 311, Footnotes.
2. MERCER, p. 15.
locust 'sing', though he is not prepared like Emerson, to accept its doctrines without a "minute" criticism. Shermam Paul notes that "Thoreau with his desire for heroic action (can) not accept its counsels of passivity" and fate. He is unable to understand the concept of caste-duties too. His spontaneous reaction to its doctrines is conveyed in a series of questions. In response to Krishna's repeated reminders that he is same to all mankind, Thoreau says:

"This teaching is not practical in the sense in which the New Testament is. It is not always sound sense in practice. The Brahman never proposes courageously to assault evil, but patiently to starve it out. His active faculties are paralyzed by the idea of caste, of impassable limits, of destiny and the tyranny of time. Kree-shna's argument, it must be allowed, is defective. No sufficient reason is given why Arjuna should fight. Arjuna may be convinced, but the reader is not, for his judgment is not "formed upon the speculative doctrines of the Sankhysa-Bastra." "Seek an asylum in wisdom alone"; but what is wisdom to a Western mind? The duty of which he speaks is an arbitrary one. When was it established? The Brahman's virtue consists in doing, not right, but arbitrary things. What is that which a man "hath to do"? What is "action"? What are the "settled functions"? What is "man's own religion", which is so much better than another's? What is "a man's own particular calling"? What are the duties which are appointed by one's birth? It is a defence of the institution of caste, of what is called the "natural duty" of the Kshetree, or soldier, "to attach himself to the discipline", "not to flee from the field" and the like, but they who are unconcerned about the consequences of their actions are not therefore unconcerned about their actions."

It is the spontaneous reaction of a yankee, belonging to the race of "pioneers" having been nurtured in a different natural and social milieu. But as the heat of the first reaction evaporates,

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1. SHERMAN PAUL, p. 353.
3. A WEEK, pp. 113-114.
his appreciation of the Gita begins to reflect mellowness and maturity. More reflection and practical experience enable him to understand those doctrines, which baffled him previously. For example his 'door-way experience' finally unlocks the meaning of "contemplation and the forsaking of works" and finally melts his misapprehensions.

As compared to 'A Week', there are, in 'Walden', relatively a fewer quotations from the Gita, presumably because in the five years intervening the two books, Thoreau has so completely integrated his Hindu perspective, with his transcendental inheritance that quotations hardly seem necessary. After absorbing the ideas from the Gita, now he clothes them in his own words. Nevertheless a perceptive student can easily detect the variegated threads of the Gita-spiritualism, even in those numerous passages of Walden, where no specific references occur. Structurally and thematically the Gita holds the whole book together. Whether to treat Walden as "sui generis an original product of the imagination" or "a spiritual biography - a Pilgrim's Progress to the good life," in both the cases it is propped by the Gita. Prof. Stein in his thought provoking paper, 'Thoreau's Walden and the Bhagavad Gita' convincingly proves that:

"The dialectic of Walden derives its direction and purpose from this guiding philosophy of the Bhagavad

2. Walter Harding; The Variorum Walden, Twayne Publishers Inc., New York, 1967, p. 21; hereafter referred to as WALDEN."
Gita Thoreau employs the same number of Chapters (18) to develop its implications in the context of his own times.1

Elsewhere Stein observes that Thoreau's aim is to master over the techniques of meditation and asceticism. "The total design of Walden is no more than an elaboration of this formula, a detailed account of his cultivation of the state of awakening."2

Reviewing Stein's paper 'Thoreau's Walden and the Bhagavad Gita R.W. McReynold remarks:

"(In Walden) Thoreau follows the Hindu Bhagavad-Gita down through the minutest structural and philosophical details. Westerners read Walden superficially."3

R.W. McReynold's observation is quite appropriate in view of the fact that many of Thoreau's important statements, which perplex the Western mind, become intelligible, as soon as they are interpreted in the light of the doctrines of Krishna. A close perusal of Walden, particularly of its underlying themes and an in-depth study of its tropes and parables, reveal how faithfully and diligently Thoreau follows the lectures of Krishna.

In the opening chapter of Walden (Economy) Thoreau exposes the hollowness of the contemporary social and moral standards; the pitfalls of their linear or historical approach; their attachment to luxury, their acquisitive instinct and their ignorance, by a skilful application of Krishna's arguments to a radically different

social set-up, in a style radiating the charm of novelty. Krishna
condemns attachment to desire, for it leads to self-destruction.¹
Much in the same manner, Thoreau argues that "money is not required
to buy one necessary of the soul."² and that richness does not
come from acquisition but from abandonment:-

"a man is rich in proportion to the number of things,
which he can afford to let alone."³

Here Thoreau echoes the words of Krishna, who declared that:-

"He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing,
without any sense of mineness or egotism, he attains to
peace."⁴

Peace comes through non-attachment, through enlightenment. The
first step of enlightenment is the kindling of the vital heat by
"the renunciative austerities of yoga."⁵ This idea of Thoreau has
been paralleled in the Gita:-

"Some again offer all the works of their senses and
the works of the vital force into the fire of the yoga
of self-control, kindled by knowledge."⁶

Now the kindled 'vital heat' is to be converted into light — a
process which involves the Raj-Yogic practices of concentration
and meditation. Thoreau advises his countrymen, therefore, to
cultivate 'divine economy', which requires "an internal industry
and expansion."⁷ in solitude. This theme — that of vital heat

2. WALDEN, p. 263 (Chapter XVIII).
3. WALDEN, p. 82 (Chapter II)
5. William Byashe Stein's phrase in The Yoga of Walden, Chapter I
   (EconomY0, Literature East & West, 13, 1 & 2 (1969), p. 14;
   hereafter referred to as The Yoga of Walden.
6. B.G., IV, 27.
7. Quoted in Thoreau's Walden and the Bhagavad-Gita, p. 44.
and asceticism dominates many chapters of Walden notably Chapters I (Economy) XIII (House-Warming) and XVIII (Spring).

Another high point of yoga, discrimination or the power of discrimination forms the subject matter of the second chapter (Where I Lived, And What I Lived for). With the help of the parable of 'King's Son' Thoreau points out that:

"So soul from the circumstances in which it is placed mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher, and then it knows itself to be Brahmc".

Thoreau means to say that for an ignorant Arjuna a Krishna is required. But in case the services of such a teacher are not available, the books (of course like the Gita) "must serve to reveal the path to selfhood or salvation." Thoreau suggests this point in Chapter III (Reading). Chapter IV (Sounds) implies the Yoga of Sound, which again is taken up in Chapter XI (Higher Laws). Chapter V (Solitude) deals with Thoreau's adjustment of "his life to its standards of austerity by practising Krishna's Yoga-exercises."

In this chapter Thoreau also testifies that we can stand aloof from our actions, and watch them as Spectators (Saksin'). This fact reminds us of the parable of two birds in the Upanishads; one representing 'Jiva' (finite) and other representing 'Saksin' (infinite). The Gita itself, is a dialogue between the finite (Arjuna) and the infinite (Krishna). This strong under-current

1. Quoted by Thoreau in Walden, p. 93 (Chapter II).
of Yoga, which sustains 'Walden' all through, has its source, in the Gita.

It is actually this urge, which drives Thoreau to Walden Pond. The roots of this urge can be found in his nature, whose genius is active and whose faith, contemplative. His spiritual interests develop in him a deep repugnance to the contemporary way of life, its "acquisitive impulses" and to "the obsessive inclinations of his culture."¹ He loses his faith in the Christian belief of the improvement of environmental circumstances and its preoccupation with historical truth. An early proof of this disillusionment can be found in his attack on the "Commercial Spirit" of the age, in his commencement debate.² Being painfully conscious of the triviality of his present engagements, he responds to the promptings of his "inner-voice," suggesting the possibility of "a glorious existence." This leads Thoreau to self-scrutiny. In the journal of 1837, he writes:

"My desire is to know, what I have lived, that I may know how to live henceforth."³

The same concern for life is also expressed at the outset of his essay 'Life Without Principles', wherein he asks us to consider the way in which, we spend our lives. On March 5, 1838, he poses a serious question:

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². NAGLEY, p. 307.

³. R.K. DHAVAN, Henry David Thoreau, Classical Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1985; hereafter referred to as DHAVAN.
"Can he not, wriggling, screwing, self-exhorting, self-constraining, wriggle or screw out something that shall live-respected, intact, intangible not to be sneezed at?"

Thoreau's quest for a purposeful life becomes more acute, after his reading of the 'Laws of Manu', in which Manu, "the mystic progenitor of human race", suggests a life of seclusion, study and meditation, for student ('Shahmchari') and the retired man ('Vanprasthi'):

"Let him take up his consecrated fire, and all his domestic implements of making oblations to it, and, departing from the town to the forest, let him dwell in it with complete power over his organs of sense and action."

"With many sorts of pure food, such as holy sages used to eat, with green herbs, roots and fruit, let him perform the five great sacraments before mentioned, introducing them with due ceremonies."2

As this type of life meets the pragmatic and transcendental demands of his nature, naturally it seizes upon the imagination of Thoreau. During his visit to the Merrimack river in 1839, he felt:--

"We thought that we might lead a dignified Oriental life along this stream as well...."3

The long cherished desire gradually becomes a passion, which is turned into a resolution by the continuous coaxing of his friend William Ellery Channing, who, on March 5, 1845 writes to him saying:--

"I see nothing for you in this earth but that field, which I once christened 'Briars'; go out upon that, build

1. DHAVAN, p. 54.
3. A WEEK, p. 102.
yourself a hut, & there begin the grand process of
devouring yourself alive." 1

However Channing does not suggest the guidelines, in accordance
with which the life is to be lived there. Thoreau does not go to
wilderness with a gypsy-heart, or as a pleasure tripper or as a
mere sojourner in nature. He is a tireless experimenter, who likes
to translate his ideas into action. Testifying the active habits
of Thoreau, Krutch writes:-

"Thoreau was not at any time merely a man gesticu-
ting in a vacuum." 2

Significantly he launches his experiment on the anniversary of his
country's Independence - the 4th of July 1845. Perhaps his gesture
is symbolic. Analyzing his motive Stein writes:-

"Disdaining the illusion of political liberty, he
thereby consecrates his quest for absolute freedom, the
'kaivalya' or independence that is the goal of Yoga." 3

The belief that Thoreau went to Walden Pond to cultivate a new
style of life, which would free him from the shackles of meanness,
finds a strong support in Thoreau's own statement:-

"I went to the woods because I wished to live delibe-
rately, to front only the essential facts of life, and
see if I could not learn what it had to teach,.....not....
to live what is not life,.....nor....I wish to practise
resignation...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the
marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as
to put to rout all that was not life,...and to reduce it
to its lowest terms,...to get the whole and genuine mean-
ness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if

1. Quoted by Walter Harding in A Week, p. VIII.
   Inc., 1965, p. 120; hereafter referred to as KRUTCH.
3. The Yoga of Walden, p. 3.
it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able
to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For
most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty
about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have
somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of
man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."1

The central idea of this utterance is that Thoreau resolves to
"live deep" and "to suck out all the marrow of life." Obviously
enough he believes in two layers of life. On the surface of it
there is, what he terms "not life" or a life of meaness. And
below the surface i.e. in the depth of our nature, lies another
life - the real life. Man has a centauric division within himself.
The centaur Chiron, "the teacher of the sons of the gods" and "the
archetypal figure of the wise man" is half man and half animal,
symbolizing that true wisdom is attained when man "comes to terms
with his own centauric nature", "compounded of animal instincts and
human virtues"2 or the "instinctive" and the intellectual elements."

Commensurate with these elements we have two urges in man, the
passional and the spiritual. One symbolized by Apollo and the other,
by Dionysus. The Gita also speaks of the two natures in man, or two
'Selfs' - the lower Self and the higher Self:

"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."3

For sucking out the marrow of life, one has to control the lower
elements or to use the words of Thoreau, "to subdue and cultivate a

1. WALDEN, p. 89 (Chapter II).
2. The Wisdom of Centaur, p. 197.
3. B.G., VII, 4 and 5.
few cubic feet of flesh."¹ The Gita also prescribes that one
should conquer one's lower Self by the higher Self.² For this
Self-conquest or Self-realization, Thoreau goes to Walden:–

"My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live
cheaply, nor to live dearly there, but to transact some
private business with the fewest obstacles."³

Least the 'words' 'cheaply' and 'dearly' should be used to interpret
'business' in relation to some terrestrial economic theory, Thoreau
speaks, in unambiguous terms, that his trade is with the 'Celestial
Empire'. Although Thoreau calls his business a "private business",
it is meant not for self-interest, but for public profit:–

".....there are more secrets in my trade than in most
men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from
its very nature, I would gladly tell all that I know about
it, and never paint "No Admittance" on my gate."⁴

These words of Thoreau remind us of Krishna's words:–

"To thee.....I shall declare this profoundest secret
of wisdom, combined with knowledge...This is sovereign
knowledge, sovereign secret, supreme sanctity, known by
direct experience, in accordance with the law, very easy
to practice and imperishable."⁵

The reason why Thoreau will not bar entry has been well explained
by Stein:–

"It is the gateless gate of inward perception open to
everyone and closed only by the negations of the spirit."⁶

¹. WALDEN, p. 26 (Chapter I).
². B.G., VI, 6.
³. WALDEN, p. 37 (Chapter I).
⁴. WALDEN, p. 35 (Chapter I).
⁵. B.G., IX, 1 and 2.
⁶. The Yoga of Walden, p. 16.
For this "inner directed spirituality", Thoreau rejects the 
Juda-Christian ways of salvation. He does not "wish to practise 
resignation unless it (is) quite necessary." Regarding repentance, 
one of the paths of liberation adopted by Christianity, he says:

"(It) is not a free and fair highway to God. A wise 
man will dispense with repentance. God prefers that you 
approach him thoughtful, not penitent, though you are the 
chief of sinners. It is only by forgetting yourself that 
you draw near to him...With the Hindu's virtue is an intel-
lectual exercise, not a social and practical one. It is a 
knowing, not a doing." 2

Thoreau does not go to Walden, because of the sharp tongue of his 
mother, Cynthia or because of the other family-circumstances, or 
for salvaging his reputation as a wood-burner or a 'damned rascal' 
or a 'do little'. He does not go there as a 'loafer' or as a 
'skulker' either. His Walden experiment is neither an 'ambush' nor 
a pose, nor a search for some economic theory. It is a response 
to the call of his inner-voice, the voice which suggests John 
Farmer to awaken the slumbering faculties of mind, asking him:

"Why do you stay here and live this mean moiling life, 
when a glorious existence is possible for you? Those same 
stars twinkle over other fields than these - But how to 
come out of this condition and actually migrate thither? 
All that he could think of was to practise, some new auste-
rit-y, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, 
and treat himself with ever increasing respect." 3

Now for this 'private business' i.e. for letting "mind descend into 
his body to redeem it", which echoes Krishna's advice to conquer

2. Quoted by Frank MacShane in Walden and Yoga, The New England 
Quarterly, Sept., 1964; hereafter referred to as MACSHANE.
3. WALDEN, p. 186 (Chapter XI).
one's lower self by one's higher Self, Thoreau wants a place, where he has "fewest obstacles" to confront with. For this indeed, Thoreau leaves Concord and retires like St. Francis, among the birds and beasts or like Christ, retreats to Wilderness for Enlightenment. His retirement to Walden, according to Canby, is "one of the memorable gestures of the spirit of man."  

Thoreau's Walden-Sojourn and his assertion that he prefers "the solitary-dwelling" should not, in any case, lead us to think that he is 'a confirmed hermit'. For his part Thoreau does not like hermits. Actually he is appalled, when he sees hermits during his excursion in Main-Woods. Clarifying his position Thoreau says:

"It is not that we love to be alone, but that we love to soar, and we do soar, the company grows thinner & thinner till there is none at all."  

Walter Harding quite convincingly argues that

"He want(s) merely to be able to be alone when he (feels) the need to be by himself, not to dwell in complete solitude."  

Kurt Leidecker prefers to call Thoreau a 'sanyasin' in that 'hermitage' is a physical condition, while 'sanyas' is a mental disposition. He mentions Thoreau's inclination towards solitude and asceticism from his very young age, and his liking for Zeno and Diogenes. He also thinks that Thoreau was led to the outward realization of the

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1. B.G., VI, 6.  
2. CANBY, p. 204.  
'sanyasin ideal' by his poverty, the lack of intimate family ties, the deliberate refusal of steady employment and the like.

The fact that Thoreau does not like to live in hermitic isolation has been confirmed by many scholars of Thoreau such as Leidecker, Walter Harding, Canby, Max Lerner, Geongcheon Yu, etc. Leidecker observes:

"Yet he was not a hermit in the true style, for he frequently emerged out of his spells of solitude to chat with the town folk."1

In fact Thoreau’s life at Walden reminds us of the life of 'yogi', described by the Gita:

"Dwelling in solitude, eating but little, controlling speech, body and mind, and ever engaged in meditation and concentration and taking refuge in dispassion. And casting aside self-sense, force, arrogance, desire, anger, possession, egoless and tranquil in mind, he becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman."2

Thoreau does not go to Walden "to escape from civilization but to discover the true civilization that would permit and foster the greatest development of man's spiritual nature."3 To concentrate on this goal, he goes to nature and her objects. There he finds divinity lurking in every object. In wilderness, as a Spectator, he sees the dance of "Maya-Shakti, the creative activity of Brahman" in every object, as Charles Anderson would like to put it.4

Thoreau, just like the Gita, conceives of the Divine in its immanence and transcendence - the divine in man (Atman or Self), the

2. E.G., XVIII, 52-53.
3. WALTER HARDING, p. 143.
Divine in Nature (Brahman), and the Divine beyond and above them (Brahman without qualities). In his characteristic style he asserts that Heaven is under our feet and above our heads. Thoreau goes to Walden not only to have an opportunity to hear the wind whispering among the reeds and see the spring come in, as the symbols of the external divinity, but also to explore the inner reality, by the application of the 'Higher-Laws', gleaned from the Oriental books.

From the above discussion it is obvious that Thoreau should have devoted the major portion of his time at Walden Pond in the practice of yoga. Now the important point is to determine the kind of yoga he practised. Before embarking upon this discussion let us define 'yoga'. The word 'yoga' has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'yuj', which means to unite. In this sense the word bears philological relation to the English word 'yoke', the Latin word 'junge' and the German word 'joch'. The underlying sense of all these terms is 'linking' or 'union'. In the modern usage the word has two connotations: first the union of Atman with Brahman i.e. the Self and God, and second the path leading to this union. Interpreted in the light of the above observation, the 'yogi' is a person, who by adopting a well defined path, consciously tries to achieve union with God. If we apply this criterion to Thoreau, there is overwhelming evidence both internal and external to testify his position as a 'yogi'. Thoreau appears very keen to project himself as a 'yogi'. Writing to H.G.O. Blake in 1849, he declares that

"I would fain practice, the yoga faithfully... To some extent, and at rare intervals even I am yogi."}

1. Quoted in CHRISTY, p. 201.
Although Thoreau does not claim to be a full fledged 'yogi', he visualizes his links with the Hindu 'yogis':

"The descendent of religious devotees who dwelt at the roots of trees, with his crust of bread and water jug cools his water with ice from my well. If I am not a modern Hindu we are near neighbours - and by the vehicle of commerce we quench our thirst and cool our lips at the same well."  

Some of his friends have also pictured him as a 'yogi'. For example Moncure Conway, who knew both Thoreau and Hindus, writes:—

"Like the pious yogi, so long motionless, whilst gazing on the sun that knotty plants encircled his neck and the cast-snake-skin his loins and the birds built their nests on his shoulders, this poet and naturalist, by equal consecration, became a part of the field and forest."  

This is Conway's picture of Thoreau at Walden, of course, a little over-done. At another place Conway writes:—

"Thoreau, naturalist and scholar, passed his life in the woods as a devout yogi, studying the Bhagvat Geeta and the Puranes."  

Recently, upholding Conway's views, D.F. Mercer has commented:—

"At Walden he lived the life of a Hindu yogi, and his renunciation, if it may so be called, far from being the penance self-inflicted by a religious fanatic, was the result of clear thinking. As a consequence, he appreciated and quoted Warren Hastings' comment on yoga practice; he knew from his own experience the value of ordered contemplation."  

Walter Harding, after examining various aspects of the Oriental influence on Thoreau, concludes that Thoreau does not accept

1. Quoted in DHAUAN, p. 51.  
3. Quoted in MERCER, p. 4 (footnotes).  
4. MERCER, p. 15.
"ascetic-self-torture" and pessimism of Hindus. He cannot appreciate the Hindu insistence that the man who has reached a stage of true enlightenment is freed from the consequences of works. Yet on the positive side Thoreau came very close to the kind of asceticism described in the Gita. Winding up his discussion Harding quotes Christy:

"But he was a New England yogi, conditioned by his nativity and his moral and religious heritage."¹

More recently, William Eysen Stein, in a series of articles on Thoreau's 'yoga', has put forward ingenious arguments to prove Thoreau's sustained practice of Indian 'yoga'.

If we put all the threads of 'yoga' together, and do not confuse 'yoga' with 'hathayoga', there is irrefutable evidence to substantiate Thoreau's claim. The practitioner of 'yoga' is required to have certain intellectual and moral qualities viz. an attitude of indifference and non-attachment to worldly desires, a power of discrimination, the virtues of temperance determination sustained devotion and austerity. Thoreau has all of them in a remarkable degree. Moreover the 'yogi' must have full conviction in certain metaphysical assumptions, namely monism or qualified monism, macrocosm, macrocosm and liberation. He should firmly believe that "every finite entity is the microcosm of the macrocosm and every microcosm is the habitation of Supreme Spirit."² He should know that the same laws govern the evolution of nature and that the human body including

1. CHRISTY, p. 206.
2. The Yoga of Walden, p. 2.
consciouaneas has "latent capacity to achieve the state of awak-
ing through his "own intellectual exertion". Man "has to activate
the process through his own volition - through spiritual endeavour",
whereas the animal has "an inward resource of self transformation."
Let us elaborate the philosophical basis of Thoreau's 'yoga'.

In the metaphysical assumptions of his 'yoga', Thoreau closely
follows his friend Emerson. Although his approach marks a reaction
against the unspiritual attitude of his countrymen, he is still
tolerant of their views, and in the case of God, is quite willing
'to let the Christians love their Christ more than "his Buddha."
This remark of Thoreau, on the one hand shows his spirit of cath-
olicity, on the other it also confirms Thoreau's disbelief in Christ
and for that matter in Personal God. His God, being divine through
and through, is an eternal energy or a divine presence, much like the
Over-Soul of Emerson: He writes in Walden:-

"I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of
something kindred to me, even in the scenes which we are
accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the
nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor
a villager."

Thoreau sees, smells and hears God everywhere, much in the spirit
of the Gita which says:-

"He whose self is harmonized by yoga seeth the Self
abiding in all beings and all being in the Self; every-
where he sees the same."

1. The Hindu Matrix of Walden, pp. 310-311.
3. Ibid., p. 13.
4. WALDEN, p. 120 (Chapter V).
5. B.G., VI, 29.
Commenting on the all pervasive feeling of Thoreau, Arthur Christy observes:

"(His) sense of kinship with trees, his brotherhood with every living object, his identification of personal life with universal life permeate all his work." 1

Thoreau also believes in the philosophy of Maya "the modus operandi of universe", as phrased by Anderson. Maya accounts for the dual nature of the universe, the temporal and the eternal. Maya is a veil, in so far as it hides reality and gives an illusory foundation to the world of appearance; it is also a web, as it ropes man to this unreal world. In the style of Krishna, Thoreau declares:

"We think that that is which appears to be." 2

In order to free ourselves from the clutches of Maya, Thoreau suggests us to "wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion and prejudice" and "come to a hard bottom and rocks in place which we can call reality." 3

Thoreau has faith in the doctrine of the immortality of soul and its corollaries - the doctrines of transmigration and Karma, although he does not formulate them in clear terms. The Gita says that the soul is ancient, it does not die; it is eternal. 4 Thoreau on his part says that the babe is "more ancient than Nestor or the Sibyls, and bears the wrinkles of Father Saturn himself." 4 This statement implies that Thoreau has a belief in the continuity of life after death, i.e. in the transmigration and rebirth of the soul.

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1. CHRISTY, p. 205.
2. WALDEN, p. 93 (Chapter II).
3. WALDEN, p. 94 (Chapter II).
5. A WEEK, p. 124.
and its long journey through various lives before attaining liberty. In the case of Karma he believes that we have got to render account for the deeds done in the body. At one place he quotes that the evil that men do lives after them. Let us here remember that Thoreau does not deny evil, but he allows it only phenomenal existence, believing in its ultimate amelioration. No body can escape this inevitable and inexorable law, the starting point of the evolution of this world:

"Karma is the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence."¹

Apparently the law of Karma seems to involve fatalism and pessimism, as it contradicts man’s free-agency or free-will. Understood correctly, it does not; it rather conclusively proves man’s authorship of his own lot, and his "unquestionable ability" to put Thoreau’s own words "to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour."² In the Gita Krishna advises Arjuna to lift his self by Self.³ After explaining every aspect of human condition, he leaves everything to the free choice of Arjuna:

"Having reflected on it fully do as thou choosest."⁴

These philosophical assumptions, provide such a depth and dimension to Thoreau's 'yoga'—a depth and dimension, which is a rare thing in the history of mysticism. Thoreau can be called a complete 'yogi' in that he has ascendancy over all the aspects of

1. E.G., VIII, 3.
2. WALDEN, p. 89 (Chapter II).
3. E.G., VI, 5.
4. E.G., XVIII, 63.
Transcendental experience — theory, practice, ecstasy and articulation. The following pages bear witness to this fact.

Thoreau is a Transcendentalist. The central point of Transcendental philosophy, according to Steven Fink, "is the mystical experience of unification with the cosmos," an experience which the Transcendentalist tries to communicate to others. In this sense Thoreau, can be called in Emerson's words the 'actor' and the 'speaker' of truth. As an actor, he puts into practice his principles of 'yoga' and as a speaker he articulates his experience in his books particularly in 'A Week' and 'Walden'. Thoreau incorporates some of his 'yoga'-experiences in A Week, written during his 'Walden-days' in the memory of his brother John, with whom he accomplished a voyage to the Concord and Merrimack Rivers in 1837. The otherwise formless work is held together by the iron-strings of 'yoga'. It is "carefully structured around the quest for self-liberation." Sherman Paul and William Drake suggest that the physical journey is an analogue of inward exploration. On the surface it is a record of an actual two-week journey condensed into a seven day journey, ostensibly to correspond to the seven stages of his inner journey, William Byashe Stein designates this journey as the "solar-journey" and its path as 'devayana' — "the path of and to God" — a path which has also been variously described as

3. Referred to in Thoreau's Redemptive Week, p. 23.
"the great road" or "the road of the heroes" or the "path of the sun." Interestingly 'devayana' is one of the two paths, mentioned in the Gita; the other being 'pitrayana', the path of the moon:

"Fire, light, day, the bright (half of the month), the six months of the northern path (of the Sun), then going forth, the men who know the Absolute go to the Absolute. Smoke, night, so also the dark (half of the month), the six months of the southern path (of the Sun), then going forth, the yogi obtains the lunar light and returns." 2

'Devayana' leads to permanent liberation, whereas 'pitrayana' to a temporary one.

Thoreau carries on his main argument in two vehicles. First he makes the narrative of the boat to symbolize a journey through different states of consciousness, viz. waking ('jagriti'), dreaming ('svapna'), dreamless ('suoupti') and the state of pure consciousness ('Turiya'). Second he uses verse quotations mostly from his own poems to crystallize his purpose. 3 Again prose quotations are used to heighten the spiritual effect by focussing reader's attention on the kind of knowledge, Thoreau hopes to transcend in his union with divine light. Furthermore he employs literary and symbolic devices, the 'cloud', 'eye', 'ray', and 'sun' imagery, the 'boat' metaphor, the liturgical sounds, the double tropes, the allegorical 'rivers' and 'oceans' and puns on the orient to make his purpose explicit. 4

The kind of 'yoga', which Thoreau formulates in A Week defies classification. He is not bound by any "classical tradition", but

2. E.S., VIII, 24 & 25.
3. Thoreau's First Book, p. 5.
attempts his typical version of 'philosophia perennis' — a compound of the 'Gāyatrī' worship, 'Mantra yoga', 'Dhūani yoga', 'Hamsavidya' and 'Raj yoga'. The ingredients of this yoga are drawn from the 'Ordinances of Manu', 'The Mahabharat', the 'Yoga Sutras', 'The Brahma Sutras', 'the Upanishads', 'the Vedanta Sūtra', 'the Vishnu Purana' and above all 'the Bhagavad Gīta'. However, the principles of 'yoga', enunciated by Krishna, play a leading role. To begin with, these principles form all the important philosophical tenets which sustain his spiritualism viz. the concepts of Atman, Brahman, Maya, Karman, etc. The Gīta also inspires his eclecticism and symbolism — it is also behind his habit of making statements, which have more than one meanings. Furthermore it helps him to develop a spirit of catholicity and tolerance of the conflicting points of view.

The Gīta impresses upon Thoreau's mind the fact of the diversity of human nature and the necessity of developing and following one's own path of 'yoga', suitable to one's 'calling'. It enables to him to visualize the need for 'saṅgata dharma' ('philosophia perennis') and anti-historical approach i.e. the discovery of "cyclical time" beneath "linear time." — an approach common to all schools of mysticism. In A Week, Thoreau writes:

"Where a battle has been fought, you will find nothing but the bones of men and beasts; where a battle is being fought there are hearts beating."

1. Thoreau's First Book, p. 5.
Interestingly enough, the Gita, though taught in the battle-field says nothing about the external battle. Throughout the book Krishna concerns himself with the battle that is raging within.

But perhaps the most significant contribution of the Gita lies in the fact that it inspires Thoreau to develop an attitude of non-attachment and a preference for 'the Way of Knowledge'. He cites around a hundred lines of the scripture to argue the necessity of non-attachment - the gist being conveyed in the following lines:-

"Wise men call him a Pandect, whose every undertaking is free from the idea of desire, and whose actions are consumed by the fire of wisdom. He abandoneth the desire of a reward of his actions, he is always contented and independent, and although he is engaged in a work, he, as it were, doeth nothing."1

The Gita also teaches him to prefer knowledge to action:-

"The action stands at a distance inferior to the application of wisdom."2

Apart from helping Thoreau to crystallize his metaphysical concepts, and to fix priorities, the Gita enables Thoreau to conceive of the pattern of his book. Thoreau carries out his spiritual dialogue with his brother John (presumably his lost Self or the real Self) much in the same way as Krishna carries his dialogue with his 'friend', the Sanskrit for which is 'mitra', which also means the 'sun'. Thoreau uses this word pointedly, probably to remind us that his journey is essentially the 'solar-journey'. It can also be taken to mean the journey to the other shore of Transcendental wisdom ('prajna parmita')3. Thoreau writes:-

1. A WEEK, p. 113.
2. A WEEK, p. 112.
"I am bound, I am bound, for a distant shore."¹

The attainment of this wisdom invariably entails a voyage, across the river of 'samsara' (temporal birth and death) on the bark of wisdom:-

"Even if thou shouldst be the most sinful of all sinners, thou shalt cross over all evil by the boat of wisdom alone."²

After crossing this river Thoreau aims at reaching the permanent shore:-

"Thou seemest the only permanent shore."³

This journey from the impermanent shore, to the permanent, reminds us of that Upanishad- 'mahavakya' "Tat-tvam asi" (That thou art), which forms the core of Krishna's lectures.

Another thematic expression of Thoreau, contained in the line :-

"Man is man's foe and destiny."⁴

echoes the following verse of the Gita:-

"...the Self alone is the friend of the Self and the Self alone is the enemy of the Self."⁵

At times Thoreau seems to undertake 'Rajyogic' - practices of breath-control ('pranayama'). It is also called 'Hamsavidya', for the word 'ham' is said to denote 'inhaling' and the word 'sa', to denote 'exhaling'. The knowledge of the true Self, which is the

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¹. A WEEK, no pagination, an epigraph, occurring just before page 1.
². B.G., IV, 36 (Wilkina’s translation).
³. A WEEK, no pagination, an epigraph before page 1.
⁴. A WEEK, p. 198.
⁵. B.G., VI, 5.
chief end of man, "can be realized through the control of the breath ('wind') that sustains life in "any body."¹

It is also evident that in A Week Thoreau practises 'the yoga of sound' ('dhvani yoga'), which entails concentration on sound. This yoga, according to Stein, exercises tremendous influence upon his imagination. Internally Thoreau intends to concentrate on 'Aum'. The letters of this 'mantra' ('AUM') symbolically represent the four states of human psyche—waking, dreaming, dreamless and the state of pure consciousness. Thoreau's sources for this 'yoga' are perhaps the 'Yoga Sutras', 'the Brahma Sutras' and the 'Gayatri' worship. However references to this type of 'yoga' can be found in the Gita also:

"He who utters the single syllable Aum (which is) Brahman, remembering Me as he departs, giving up his body, he goes to the highest goal."²

The influence of the Gita reaches its climax in the terminal chapter, wherein Thoreau, at last, glimpses the sun-door, symbolizing the abode of God. But, Thoreau refuses to enter into it and very surprisingly chooses to identify himself not with God, but with the creative energy of God ('Maya-Shakti'):

"not his Father but his Mother stirs in him."³

Thoreau reasons that the secrets of Nature can be read only if he develops those "divine germs" called "the pure-senses". Here Thoreau, perhaps has the 'divyachakau' of the Gita in his mind. Krishna says:

1. The Yoga of Walden, p. 21.
"But thou canst not behold Me with this (human) eye of yours; I will bestow on thee the supernatural eye. Behold My divine power." 1

By divine eyes Thoreau ultimately sees Brahman i.e. the highest external reality and attains liberation from the bonds of time. He now experiences perfect joy - the joy of pure-consciousness - the joy which the Gita describes as:

"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." 2

The tentative 'yoga' of 'A Week' attains a definite form in Walden, presumably because Walden provides an ideal setting for it. He turns his back from material pursuits, possessions, attachment and luxuries i.e. from all those things, which interfere with proper understanding. Liberating himself from the prison of desire, which is as great an enemy as Satan, he turns his mind inward.

Now he finally adopts the Gita as his sole guide for self-exploration. Thoreau accepts the basic assumption of Krishna that every man has his peculiar "calling", which he must invariably answer. This fact necessitates that every body should devise his own method of 'yoga', which meets the peculiar demands of his own nature. Thoreau is well aware of the two strands of his nature, the active and the contemplative. Naturally he aspires to cultivate a method of yoga, which can meet the pragmatic and the transcendental demands of his "calling". And as the Gita is the only book, which

2. B.G., VI, 21.
accommodates the worldly and the other-worldly interests in a desirable ratio, Thoreau unhesitatingly adopts it as his guide and model.

Significantly, Krishna propounds a system of 'yoga,' which meets the cognitive, conative and volitive demands of human psyche. It is not that he recommends different paths of 'yoga' for different persons e.g. the Path of Action for the active, the Path of Knowledge for the intellectual and the Path of Devotion for the emotional. Actually he puts forward a 'yoga,' which combines the elements of the three paths, with adjustments allowed to suit one's peculiar "calling." Thoreau, like any other faithful disciple of Krishna, fashions the kind of 'yoga,' which will suit not only his character but also his condition and country. Finally he gives us the prototype of a composite yoga, which has the devotional approach of the Way of Devotion, the non-attachment of the Way of Action, the discrimination and asceticism of the Way of Knowledge and the discipline of Hathayoga—all finally culminating into the meditative exercises of the Royal Path. In the following pages an effort will be made to substantiate this point. 1

The Way of Devotion (Shakti-yoga) is perhaps the weakest point of Thoreau's yoga; for this type of yoga makes very little impression on Thoreau's predominantly intellectual, unemotional and critical temperament. He lacks the basic requirement of this way i.e. the belief in a personal God. Nevertheless his character

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1. For a detailed discussion on Yoga, see Chapter III of this dissertation.
radiates the light of friendliness, patience and tranquillity, which according to Krishna, are the chief qualities of a devotee. Furthermore he betrays a devotional attitude towards the ultimate reality, although this ultimate reality for him is not a personal God, but Nature. We remember that Nature has been equated with Brahma on many occasions in the Gita. Interestingly Walden Pond for Thoreau is not merely a natural phenomenon, but the microcosm of macrocosm, being many things in one—"earth's eye", "sky-water", "God's drop" and the symbol of man's own geographical unity and balance of ideas, like the lake of 'mansarover' of Indian mythology. Thoreau also accepts the world-view described by the Gita, in the chapters, which are concerned with the Bhaktiyoga. Besides his solutions of the problems of death and immortality, his belief in God and his faith in the ultimate union with Him reflect his deep devotional spirit—a spirit which is also evident from his answer to Aunt Louisa that "he had never quarrelled with (God)."

Thoreau is more inclined towards Karmayoga or Yoga of Action, for as a man of active habits, and firm convictions, he shows a natural inclination to translate his ideas into action. Hence he cultivates a 'yoga', which "at least in its early stages"...is very similar to that of Karmayoga." Furthermore the Gita advocates the 'oneness' of action and wisdom:

"He who sees the ways of renunciation and action are one, he sees truly."

2. MACSHANE, p. 339.
3. CANEY, p. 438.
4. MACSHANE, p. 327.
5. B.G., V, 5.
As this oneness of action and wisdom caters to the active and contemplative needs of Thoreau he accept(s) 'Karmayoga' and advocate(s) it for the people...¹ 'Karmayoga' entails non-attachment. Thoreau develops this attitude, as Nagley conclusively proves, after overcoming his initial habit of detachment and attachment.² The Path of Action envisages that every action is to be done in a disinterested way, having no concern, whatsoever with its fruits.³ At the initial stages the Yankee in Thoreau, does not see the possibility of such an action. But in Walden as Prof. Dhawan argues, he overcomes this obsession.⁴ For doing disinterested action, a 'Karmayogi' is required to distinguish between the action and the fruit of one's action. According to Thoreau we can develop the habit of this discrimination by practice:-

"By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad go, by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature."⁵

The principal advantage of this habit is that the practitioner is relieved from anxiety. Thoreau writes:-

"The true husbandman will cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifest no concern whether the woods will bear chestnuts this year or not, and finish his labour with every day, relinquishing all claim to the produce of his fields and sacrificing in his mind not only his first but his last fruits also."⁶

1. Sreekrisna Sarma: A Short Study of the Oriental Influence Upon Henry David Thoreau with Special Reference to his Walden, Jhrbuch fur Amerikastudien I, p. 81; hereafter referred to as SARMA.  
3. B.G., II, 47.  
4. DHAWAN, p. 60.  
5. WALDEN, p. 122 (Chapter V).  
6. WALDEN, p. 145 (Chapter VII).
Furthermore the 'Karmayogi' is required to discharge his duty and perform functions allotted to him, Krishna says:-

"Do thou thy allotted work, for action is better than inaction."\(^1\)

Though Thoreau does not appreciate the concept of caste duties, yet he calls upon people to love their profession:-

"However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are...Love your life, poor as it is...."\(^2\)

Thoreau's exhortation is inspired, perhaps, by Krishna's words:-

"One should not give up the work suited to one's nature .....though it may be defective......"\(^3\)

We can cite at least three instances from Thoreau's life at Walden, symbolizing the elements of 'Karmayoga': the building of the hut at Walden Pond, the cultivation of beans and the life of the French-Canadian Wood-chopper. Thoreau's erection of his house on the pond exemplifies his refined practice of Karmayoga, because, he undertakes the project wholly indifferent to the laughter, contempt or derision of his neighbours,\(^4\) much in the spirit suggested by the Gita:-

"Treating alike, pleasure and pain, gain and loss victory, and defeat, then get ready for battle...."\(^5\)

Next Thoreau cultivates beans in the spirit of a 'Karmayogi'. Initially he seems to be attached with beans. But as soon as he

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1. B.G., III, 8.
2. WALDEN, pp. 262-263 (Chapter XVIII).
5. B.G., II, 38.
realizes that these beans symbolize higher ends, he becomes thoroughly detached:

"It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans."1 In this sentence, says MacShane, Thoreau demonstrates, the highest point of his own Karmayoga.2 Now by the example of the life of the French-Canadian Wood-chopper Thoreau distinguishes two kinds of 'Karmayoga' — natural or instinctive and intelligent. The French-Canadian Wood-chopper, living a life of natural simplicity, seems to be a 'Karmayogi' by instinct, but actually he is not; for he is not able to discriminate action from inaction. His life is imprisoned in his own activity. Such a life is the life of bondage. The Gita says:

"Save work done as and for a sacrifice this world is in bondage to work."3

The 'Karmayogi' does his work in the spirit of sacrifice. His work does not imprison him, rather it liberates him. Surrendering everything to God, a true 'Karmayogi' exists in the ocean of life, like a lotus leaf:

"He who works, having given up attachment, resigning his actions to God, is not touched by sin, even as a lotus leaf (is untouched) by water."4

Thoreau, in order to illustrate this idea, uses the figure of a salt fish:

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1. WALDEN, p. 140, Chapter VII.
2. MACSHANE, p. 329.
4. B.G., V, 10.
"Who has not seen a salt fish, thoroughly cured for this world, so that nothing can spoil it, and putting the perseverance of the saints to the blush."  

However Thoreau's real aim is not merely to develop a code of conduct, but to explore his self. This necessitates the cultivation of wisdom. Wisdom, as Krishna says, is "enveloped" by the "insatiable fire of desire." The senses, the mind and the intelligence are said to be the seats of desire, which produces delusion. The only way to "slay this sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination" is self-knowledge.  

For self knowledge one has to awaken the slumbering powers of mind, which can be done by the practice of 'tapas' or 'asceticism'. The yoga of 'tapas' is based on the belief that "the meditative austerities" of the god of fire "produced the heat that generated the cosmos and whose essence thereafter abode in the human heart, the household hearth and the sun." 'Tapas', by awakening and energizing the "inner-sun", abolishes human limitations including the biometal tyrannical of pain and pleasure re-establishes the link between the inner and the cosmic heat. In the Gita 'tapas' connotes many things. It "signifies meditation, devotion, austerity, perspiration, fasting, sacrifice, sacrificial ritual and... wisdom."  

Krutch says that in Thoreau, there runs a strong strain of asceticism, which is "rather more Hindu than Christian." In order to kindle, increase and sustain 'inner-heat', Thoreau practises

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1. WALDEN, p. 112 (Chapter IV)  
3. The Hindu Matrix of Walden, p. 312.  
5. KRUTCH, p. 48.
asceticism in form of 'tapas' faithfully. 'Tapas' requires both external and internal cleansing. For external purification, he takes to bathing in the Pond, just like a devout Brahmin. Rising early in the morning, "the most memorable season", he tries to develop a satinal or auroral outlook. After bathing, he washes his intellect in "the cosmogenetic philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta." Thoreau's purification is accompanied by renunciation for which his term is "stripping". By "stripping" Thoreau means "sacrifice" or the exfoliation of all materialistic and sensual desires, just as the Gita says:

"Some again offer all the works of their senses and the works of the vital force into the fire of the yoga of self-control, kindled by knowledge."  

After external as well as internal purification and renunciation, Thoreau performs 'tapas'. His aim is to increase the 'inner-heat' to the extent "that no mortal can see into the eyes." Ultimately this increased heat, Thoreau intends to convert, into light for self-enlightenment. This newly acquired light sharpens Thoreau's power of discrimination, which enables him "to penetrate the surface of things." Thus in the process of practising 'Buddhi-yoga', Thoreau a true renouncer, a 'sanyasi', a perpetual drinker "at the fountain-head of day," an inebriate of divine light."  

At Walden he becomes the 'yogi' described by Krishna, in the terminal chapter of the Gita. Macshane thinks that Thoreau's attainment of 'Jnanyoga'

1. B.G., IV, 27.
2. Walden and the Bhagavad Gita, p. 54.
is best put in the river image, a familiar thing both in Walden
and the Gita.

By practising 'tapas', increasing his 'vital heat', converting
heat into light and thus by developing his power of discrimination,
Thoreau attains the 'Sakain' (witness) status, one of the highest
points in 'Jnanyoga'. He becomes a witness to his internal and
external activities, without taking part into them. Thoreau knew of
this concept much earlier than his Walden-days. In The Dial, he
quotes a passage from 'The Laws of Manu':—

"The soul is its own witness; the soul itself is its
own refuge: offend not thy conscious soul, the supreme
internal witness of men." 1

He gives an illuminating description of his 'sakain'-experienceː—

"However intense my experience, I am conscious of the
presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were,
is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience
but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is
you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over,
the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a
work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned.
This doublessness may easily make us poor neighbours and
friends sometimes." 2

Thoreau's belief in the concept of 'spectator' has its
sources in the Indian scriptures, especially in the Gita. Krishna
saysː—

"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." 3

1. WALDEN, p. 122 (Chapter V).
2. WALDEN, p. 122 (Chapter V).
But Buddhi-yoga is incomplete without 'Rajyoga', because for the conversion of heat into light — perhaps the most important point of 'Buddhi-yoga' — the three inter-connected steps of 'Rajyoga' are required. The first involves mental concentration on a single point or object ('dharana'); the second marks the achievement of full attention on the object ('dhyana'); the third signals the complete exhaustion of this thought and the advent of divine insight ('samadhi').

Naturally Thoreau adopts the practices of 'Raj-yoga'. Thoreau's interest in 'Rajyoga' or the Royal Path can be traced from A Week. There are suggestions that Thoreau practised 'pranayam' (breath-control) concentration and meditation. In A Week he concentrates on 'sounds', both external and internal. He repeats the same practice in Walden. Thoreau feels that sounds heard from a distance produce "a vibratory hum" or a "vibration of the universal lyre."

In the chapter "Higher Laws" in Walden, the flute played by Thoreau induces John Farmer to the ecstatic experience of 'samadhi' (complete-absorption). By virtue of "the magical notes he hears (Thoreau, the seer, playing?), the weight of his Karma disappears and he becomes deaf to every noise of the outside world."1 Perhaps the best known example of Thoreau's ecstatic experience is "his sunny-door-way experience":–

"I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie....in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house....I grew in those seasons like corn

in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They are not time subtracted from my life, but so much ever and above my usual allowance. I realized that the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works."

Here Thoreau experiences "the full glory of the unique mystics," so eloquently described in the Bhagavad Gita:

"Serenity and fearlessness; firm in the vow of celibacy, subdued in mind, let him sit harmonized, his mind turned to Me and intent on me alone. The yogin of subdued mind, ever keeping himself thus harmonized attains to peace, the supreme nirvan, which abides in Me."3

On the basis of the above discussion, we can say that Thoreau practises a 'yoga,' which has a well defined metaphysics behind it and which is a fusion of the elements of devotion ('Bhakti-yoga') non-attachment and disinterested action ('Karmayoga') renunciation, discrimination and asceticism ('Buddhiyoga') and the elements of concentration, contemplation and meditation ('Rajyoga'). Nevertheless, inspite of his tremendous enthusiasm, he cannot be called a 'yogi', in accordance with "the most exacting standards of India."4 Even if we allow him the title of a yogi, in a loose sense, we have to qualify it with his own phrases "to some extent" and "at rare intervals." Anyhow, considering Thoreau's peculiar circumstances, his insight into the nuances of 'yoga' is certainly amazing. Even more amazing is the profundity and dimension which he gives to his 'yoga,' so much so that other interpretations are also possible.

1. WALDEN, p. 105 (Chapter IV).
4. DALERIEPE, p. 41.
Interestingly Raymond Benoit argues that Thoreau planned Walden to be a "yantra" a chart for the gradual evolution of this vision of God and the Self.¹ Developing this argument further, Michael Gates asserts that Thoreau "intentionally or unintentionally constructed Walden as a type of Shri Yantra."² William Byashe Stein persuades us that Thoreau practised a new 'yoga' - 'the Yoga of Reading.'³ These remarks confirm the versatility of his yoga. As for sources, Sherman Paul thinks that Thoreau is indebted to the Gita for the notions of "disinterested work and contemplation."⁴ Actually he owes it even more. In fact he owes nearly all the distinctive elements of the theory and practice of his 'yoga' to the Gita.

Thoreau is not merely a visionary. He is not satisfied with merely having the 'idea' of a thing. His pragmatic interests compel him to test whether it works. Naturally, the dictum "Know Thyself" becomes with him, 'Explore Thyself.' Enlightenment is turned into self-realization and knowledge into ecstasy. Thoreau's whole life is a quest for ecstatic moments, for which he practises 'yoga.' Joel Porte thinks that desire for "self-discovery," lies "at the heart" of Walden and it is "never lost sight for long."⁵ But strangely enough he asserts that the basis of Thoreau's ecstasy

4. PAUL, p. 353.
or epiphany is, physical or passiona or sensuous. However this view is inconsistent with the views of Thoreau, who always regards intellect superior to senses as it is a "cleaver", and "discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things." ¹

Although he is gifted by strong sensuous power, he cannot be called a sensuous voluptuary. We should always remember his spartan habits. He is not a sensationalist, for he does not see things piece-meal as a sensationalist does. His viewpoint is essentially cosmic. For example he envisions the world as a huge plant and nature as a single flower:

"The heavens and the earth are one flower. The earth is the calyx, the heavens the corolla."²

It is not a sensationalist view. This metaphor reminds us of the description of this world as a fig tree:

"They speak of the imperishable asvattham (peepal tree) as having its roots above and branches below."³

To equate Thoreau with Locke is a grave injustice to this transcendentalist. He is not committed to "the philosophy of surface," for he is not content merely by knowing, the "shapes" of things; but he wants to discover their "seeds" instead. He is always after supra-sensuous things. One of his journal entry notes:

"I was always conscious of sounds in nature, which my ears could never hear."⁴

¹ WALDEN, p. 95 (Chapter II).
² Quoted in PORTE, p. 147.
³ B.G., XV, 1.
The so-called sensuous experience symbolizes for him some deeper experience, as Sherman Paul notes:

"For sound and silence were Thoreau's grand analogy: silence was a celestial sea of eternity, the general, spiritual and immutable; sound was the particular and momentary bubble on its surface." 1

Thoreau's senses penetrate the crust of objects. They go deeper, so much so that objects become symbols. Seasons stand for bigger spiritual experience. For instance "spring and winter provide vital images in Walden and function themselves as symbols of aspects of human life." 2 Furthermore his senses for him are "divine germs", meant to discover the lurking divinity in nature.

"The ears were made, not for such trivial uses as men are wont to suppose, but to hear celestial sounds. The eyes were not made for such grovelling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold beauty now invisible. May we not see God". 3

Yes, for there are moments in Thoreau's life when he has that Transcendental experience:

"I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting something to which, we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves; the one historic truth, the most remarkable fact which can become the distinct and uninvited, subject of our thought, the actual glory of the universe;..." 4

No wonder that Thoreau performs everything whether eating or bathing as a sacrament. In fact Thoreau's interests are

3. A WEEK, p. 323.
genuinely metaphysical and his experiences genuinely spiritual. Very often he feels that he is an 'enlightened one' or one of the 'elect', as he feels a halo of light around his body:—

"As I walked on the railroad causeway, I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect."¹

It is evident that Thoreau attains the crowning glory of 'yoga'. He feels "perfect peace", which casts liberating influence upon those, who come in touch with him. His sister Sophia writes:—

"It is not possible to be sad in his presence".²

Come what may, disease or disaster, Thoreau always remains unruffled and composed and never loses interest in life. Before two months of his death, he writes in a dictated letter:—

"I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing."³

On Thoreau's attainment of perfect peace, no evidence can be more conclusive than that of Sam Staples, once his jailer, and later his redman on surveying jobs. After visiting Thoreau, he confessed to Emerson:—

"Never spent an hour with more satisfaction. Never saw a man dying with so much pleasure and peace."⁴

¹. WALDEN, p. 172 (Chapter X).
². Quoted in KRUTCH, p. 245.
³. Ibid., p. 245.
⁴. Quoted in CANBY, p. 438.
So much effulgence of peace, only supreme 'yogis' can radiate. Thoreau, it can be presumed, finally achieves, what has been described by Krishna in the Gita:

"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." ¹

No wonder that this artist of Kouroo (Kurukshetra) figures among the most prominent Protestant Mystics.²

¹ B.G., VI, 20.
² See Anne Fremantle (ed.), The Protestant Mystics, pp. 198-203.